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ABSTRACT

An international team of researchers studied the following aspects of training in Belgium's retail sector: structure and characteristics, institutional and social context, employment and labor, changing conditions and their implications for skill requirements, and training and recruitment. Data were collected from an analysis of social and labor/employment statistics, literature review, and case studies of a chain of 47 supermarkets with 2,000 employees (half are part-timers) and a company consisting of six chains (including 147 discount food stores, 45 supermarkets, and 6 restaurants) and employing approximately 8,800 individuals. In both cases, at least some systematic approach to planning training was evident. In the first case, permanent training initiatives focused primarily on product knowledge but also included some degree of training in marketing, customer service, and improved communication between departments. Training was planned/delivered internally through short courses offered in quick succession. In the second company, training focused on practical knowledge with some attention to "socio-normative" skills and was contracted from external providers on a yearly basis. Training was not linked to the national education system or any sectoral programs in either company, and neither company conducted any systematic evaluation of training costs and benefits. (Fifty-five tables/figures are included. Contains 28 references.) (MN)

ED 379 485

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BELGIUM
REPORT

RETAIL SECTOR

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TASK FORCE – Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth.

CE 068 309

RETAIL SECTOR

TRAINING IN THE RETAIL SECTOR IN THE FRENCH AND FLEMISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN BELGIUM

REPORT FOR THE FORCE PROGRAMME

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Commission of the European Communities
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NOTE FOR READERS

The structure of this study reflects the concern of the two communities to product a balanced assessment of the retail sector in Belgium.

7

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FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN BELGIUM

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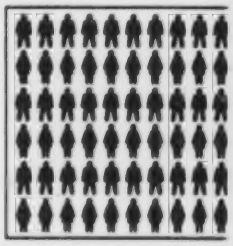
PART 1:

EMPLOYMENT, WORKING CONDITIONS AND TRAINING IN THE RETAIL SECTOR



1. Scope and definition of the retail sector
2. Structure and characteristics of the retail trade
3. Institutional and social context
4. Employment and the labour force
5. Changes and their implications for vocational qualifications and training
6. Training and recruitment
7. Issues

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1. SCOPE AND DEFINITION OF THE RETAIL SECTOR

Retail activities which fall within the bracket 52.1 to 52.6 of the European industrial classification coincide with those of the NACE (General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Community), which is still in use, for double-digit codes 64 and 65 but excluding three-digit codes 651 and 652.

The NACE codes 651 and 652 cover the retail sale of cars, motorcycles, spare parts for motor vehicles, motor fuels and lubricants.
Excluded are restaurants, bars, hotels and any other establishments offering meals, beverages or lodging. The various types of repair shops are also excluded.

The NACE classification is used as the basis of reference for employment statistics published by the Belgian Social Security Office (ONSS) and the National Institute for Health and Invalidity Insurance (INAMI).
There is, in addition, another classification in common use which is based on the scope of competence of the committees composed of representatives of the employers and the unions. These negotiating committees play an important role as far as working conditions and the wages and salaries of staff in the various retail firms are concerned. Unfortunately these committees, of which there are five in all, and their respective areas of competence do not make a distinction between the wholesale and retail trade.

2. STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RETAIL TRADE

1.

2.1 Recent developments

Although a full historical review of the Belgian retail sector would be a fascinating undertaking, we shall restrict ourselves to a brief summary that does not go back further than 1937. In order to assure the survival of small traders (and thus to avoid a difficult political and social situation) the government at that time enacted a law which was usually known as the Grendel law or the "padlock law".

This law made it illegal to create retail firms or expand existing ones to employ more than five people in larger towns or more than three people in smaller ones. Originally this law was only intended to apply for a limited period but was extended several times before being repealed in 1961.

It is to this law that the sluggishness of development in the Belgian retail sector is attributed (Leunis et De Vos, 1986). Modernization of the sector only took place in the sixties. Since then wholesalers and retailers alike have extended their activities, introduced new technology and have caught up on their foreign competitors. Particularly noticeable has been the sustained growth in the number of supermarkets, hypermarkets and shopping centres with the accent increasingly on self-service.

While this development was under way, a new wave of legislation arrived to regulate prices, shop opening hours, consumers' rights and the creation of new businesses.

The economic recession during the seventies, which continued for the greater part of the eighties, was a severe blow for the Belgian economy, which has been largely open to foreign trade and was traditionally export-oriented. As far as the retail sector was concerned the crisis encouraged a greater use of new technology (electronic scanning of bar codes, electronic payment systems) as well as different strategies with regard to customers (diversification, flexible opening hours, new locations etc.).

More detailed information on the Belgian retail sector is given in the following paragraph but the following is a summary of the general trend over the last decade.

- New technologies influence both the flow of products and the form and method of payment. Apart from electronic scanning and the use of bar codes, we find a certain number of developments such as distance-buying and distance-selling, automated payment systems using credit cards and bank cards and automation of operations involving orders, invoicing and delivery conditions.

- There is a clearly discernible tendency to concentration, both in the food and the non-food retail sector. Thus a steadily growing segment of the consumer market is being increasingly dominated by a smaller number of firms. This is particularly noticeable in the progress being made by franchising, which enables well-known firms to increase their market share without the need for heavy investment.

- Also noticeable is a change in customer mentality operating at one extreme to the benefit of hypermarkets with their low prices, self-service and rapid shopping and at the other extreme to that of the specialized small shops offering a high standard of service, and exclusive high-quality products. The large department stores have become outdated and are suddenly like a dead weight in this world of marketing innovations and the prospects for them would seem if anything unfavourable. Unless they show themselves able to adopt an original form offering cheap, practical goods or highly specialized products, their share of the market can only go on shrinking.

- However the major changes do not all boil down to economies of scale and to the development of specialized small shops. They are also now seeing the emergence of the "shop within a shop" system particularly in hypermarkets, which are seeking to shed their image of uniformity with the motto of "diversification" (by which is meant methods of selling and not of products). Other ideas are emerging at the other extreme. The shopping streets of urban centres would seem mainly to attract firms of national or international repute. This phenomenon, which sends rents per square metre spiralling, means a decreasing range of goods on offer.

- Practically all the publications on the subject mention the irreversible process of internationalization of the retail sector which leads to a limited number of strategies such as the creation of multinational companies, holding companies and global market approaches with product uniformity.

Another foreseeable feature of the sector is what we shall call the "ghost firm" which is a kind of store or hypermarket which restricts its activities to the simple purchasing and selling of non-material services. In this case all the physical activities are entrusted by prior contract to specialist firms (organizing supplies, collecting information, leasing and renting property etc.).

The outline of the innovative strategies given above has come about as the result of considerable social and demographic changes which we can only mention briefly here:

- The increase in the number of women at work limits the time that a household can spend on shopping and leads to a situation where all the shopping is done in a single store.

- The ageing population, a large proportion of which is comfortably off and anxious to buy quality, calls for a more personalized approach.

- A steadily growing number of people live a bachelor existence and create a demand for convenience foods, smaller portions etc.

- Nowadays consumption profiles are more easily put into categories than they used to be. This means that individuals tend to seek new ways of expressing their personality. Exclusive consumer goods play an important role here. Substantial sums are set aside for the promotion of clothing, fashion, design etc.

2.2 Facts and figures

We shall now cast a brief glance at the economic profile of the sector. Our first table gives us some

idea of the relative importance of traditional subsectors as they appear in official statistics.

Table 1 – Comparison of annual sales in the various segments of the retail trade (in Bfrs '000 m)

Sector	1981	1985	1990
Food	497	702	804
Non-food	860	1,101	1,374
Independent retailers	1,101	1,443	1,714
including supermarkets	*48*	*50*	*61*
Hypermarkets and large stores	75	147	157
Multiple stores or franchise operations	173	208	306
Consumer cooperatives	7	4	1
Total retail trade	1,357	1,803	2,179
Total consumer spending	2,398	3,198	4,158

Source: National Statistical Institute-FEDIS, 1991.

It should be noted that fuels, cars and motorcycles are not included in any of the above figures. The overall share of independent retailers held up well during the eighties, while the boom in hypermarkets that began at the start of the eighties slowed down somewhat towards the end of the decade. Franchising, on the other hand, would seem destined to grow.

Every year the Nielsen group carries out a study of general food stores. This firm covers any retail store meeting the following requirements:

a. markets a wide range of food products;

b. an annual turnover in excess of Bfrs 400,000;

c. food sales accounting for more than 40% of total turnover.

Table 2 – General food store: Number of stores and turnover in Bfrs bn

Year	Number	Turnover
1965	46,000	64
1970	34,900	92
1975	23,900	178
1980	18,400	286
1985	15,600	402
1989	14,000	454

Source: A.C. Nielsen-FEDIS, 1991.

Table 2 shows that the number of food stores has been declining steadily, whereas overall turnover has been rising.

Table 3 – Comparison of commercial indicators for the retail trade in Belgium and neighbouring countries

	a	b	c	d
Belgium	11,5	179,3	68%	3,108
Netherlands	6,0	63,1	79%	2,323
Germany	6,8	190,5	33%	3,076
France	7,5	154,5	65%	3,335
UK	6,0	63,1	66%	2,127

Source: "Panorma de l'industrie européenne en 1990" and A.C. Nielsen, quoted in Valenduc, 1991.

In the table
a. is the number of stores per 1000 inhabitants in 1988,
b. is the sales floor of supermarkets/hypermarkets per 1000 inhabitants,
c. is the proportion of the ten largest in total distribution in 1990,
d. is the figure for annual retail sales per capita in Bfrs, in 1988.

Although at first glance the figures – which we have not checked for reliability – appear somewhat contradictory, they lead us to conclude that concentration in the Belgian retail sector is on a par with neighbouring countries while a relatively larger number of traditional shops continue in existence. Small and medium-sized firms account for a respectable share.
While the effects of internationalization are not all one way, it cannot be denied that foreign concerns seem to be more successful in penetrating the Belgian consumer market than Belgian concerns are in making headway abroad. On the other hand, the largest Belgian retail concern (Delhaize le Lion) only ranks 19th in the top 500 firms in Europe. Moreover, 14 multiple retail firms have established a foothold in Belgium, 27 of them being of Dutch origin (compared with 7 of French, 5 of British, 3 of US and 3 of Italian origin), making a total of 1,719 stores (the number of French-owned stores in this figure is 551) (Marstboom 1988).
The largest retail companies in Belgium are the GB group, Delhaize le Lion, Makro (Dutch), Colruyt, Cora, Match, Sarma, Aldi and Mestdagh.

2.3 New and alternative forms of retailing

In 2.1 above we mentioned the existence of new forms of retailing. We shall now consider briefly their importance in Belgium.

Mail order firms

Mail order selling on the Belgian market is fairly limited. Total turnover in this segment was in the region of Bfrs 26.4 billion in 1990 and the total number of people employed was 3,500. For purposes of comparison it is worth mentioning that the French mail order firm La Redoute alone employs 7,000 people. However, mail order firms' share of total retail sales is steadily increasing and rose from 0.95% in 1980

to an estimated 1.45% in 1990 – not including motor vehicles and fuels. A recent study of the sector shows that most mail order firms are too highly specialized – 42% only offer a single type of product. These firms will probably be obliged to diversify in order to meet the challenge of the nineties.

Direct selling

Direct selling is a form of retailing in which the seller addresses himself directly to buyers in order to offer goods or services. Typical examples are door-to-door selling, demonstration selling at the vendor's home and sales in response to consumer demand. Although direct selling sometimes has the reputation of using illegal persuasion techniques, it is quite common in the United States and Japan. In Belgium direct selling accounts for a total turnover of some Bfrs 9 billion or 0.45% of total retail sales. On their own estimate firms selling direct provide employment for 9,000 people, the majority independent retailers.

Franchising

Franchising is a system whereby independent retailers sign a contract permitting them to use the name of another firm – its trademarks, labels, logos and so on – against payment. A franchisee is thus able to remain independent whilst appearing to belong to a large organization. This formula combines the flexibility, adaptability and the personal approach of a small firm with the experience, know-how and other advantages of operating on a large scale. The Belgian franchise market is worth Bfrs 100 billion and thus a fairly substantial 5% of the total retail market. There are 120 franchiser firms and 7,000 franchisees. These figures bear comparison with those of neighbouring countries; the Netherlands 215/6,800, Germany 278/20,000, the UK 348/20,000 and France 600/33,000 (source: CAP, 1991).

Examples of franchising operations in Belgium include Unic, Nopri, Christiaensen, 3 Suisses, Phildar, Bricocenter, Quick and Yves Rocher.

3. INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

3.1 Legislation

Opening hours

Because legislation governing shop opening hours directly influences the working conditions of employees in the retail trade we consider it worth summarizing the three main sources of such legislation in Belgium.

Law of 22 June 1960 on the weekly rest day (applies only to the retail trade)
This law simply sketched a broad outline of provisions and left it to the social partners to determine how they were to be applied (thus Monday is the rest day for bakers). A rest day normally means 24 hours but it does not necessarily start at 5 a.m. Where not otherwise stated the rest day is Sunday.

Law on 16 March 1971 on sunday working (part of the law on work)
This law applies to all shops, commercial firms and factories with employees. It has been frequently changed and amended over the years and at present states that, with a few exceptions, no-one may employ staff to work on Sunday afternoons. The exceptions are nominal but it is generally understood that shops are allowed to open on Sunday three times a year.
Over the past two years this law has been an apple of discord between major retailers and the unions, with each talking about flexibility. In some cases when they expected a substantial customer demand the hypermarkets opened out of normal working hours and deliberately broke the law.
Obviously this law works to the benefit of the small retailer without employees.

Law of 24 July 1978
Shops are legally obliged to close at 8 p.m. with the possibility of staying open until 9 p.m. once a week. Because of changes in people's way of life – more women working full-time, more single-person households etc. – demand for late opening is increasing. At present a number of stores stay open late and their doing so is tolerated by the authorities who see it as an opportunity for small traders to hold their own against the growing competition from larger firms.

Commercial regulations

This heading should in principle cover all legislation on shop opening hours and regulating competition, prices, quality standards, consumer protection etc. Since there are a large number of additional laws and decrees and European directives as well as local and regional regulations, we shall confine ourselves here to mentioning the two main laws in this field.

Law of 14 July 1971 on commercial practices
This law lays down the principles governing selling, pricing, products, quantities and all matters concerning retailers and governing retailers and consumers. Numerous decrees and specifications complement the provisions of this law which alongside the EC directives is the main corpus of reference as far as commerce is concerned.

Law of 29 June 1975 on the setting up of firms
This law regulates all requests for creating or extending retail sales outlets. The main criteria are the number of inhabitants in an area and the density of retail outlets. The immediate effect of this law was to put an end to what might almost be termed the exponential increase in the number of supermarkets (from 16 to 70 during the 1970-1975 period and from 70 to 77 during the 1975 to 1980 period).

Qualifications required of a retailer

Although the subject of qualifications is dealt with in Section 5 of this report, mention should be made of a recent decree requiring that any would-be retailer possess certain minimum qualifications. He must either hold a lower school leaving certificate, or have signed an apprenticeship contract with a retail store, or have at least three years' experience as a shop manager. The decree states that these criteria are satisfied if an employee of the would-be retailer meets one of the three conditions. This legislation undoubtedly opens up a new chapter in entrepreneurial activity in that a small shop can no longer be opened without qualifications.
(Fedis, 1988; Marstboom, 1989; NCMV, no date; Leunis, 1986)

3.2 The role of the social partners

The involvement of the social partners in decisions relating to employment and continuing vocational training are restricted to the allocation to training of the 0.25% of total salaries already referred to. This cross-sector agreement reached in 1991/92 provides that firms should pay 0.25% of total salaries to the Employment Fund or should sign a collective agreement concerning training and/or the inclusion of risk groups. The implementation of the programme is the responsibility of the joint employer/employee committee for the sector.
A collective agreement concerning the use of this 0.25% has been signed for the retail trade.
Implementation poses another problem. The agreement provides for the setting up of a fund with three objectives, viz.

1. Payment of bonuses when people belonging to risk groups are recruited
2. Training of less-qualified employees
3. Subsidies for crèches and child-minding services to assist women workers.

(F.R:B., 1991).

4. EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOUR FORCE

4.1 Composition of the labour force

We shall look at the main characteristics of the retail sector and then of the various segments. However, we can only give a very general idea here because, as we explained in Section 1, Belgian statistics on the subject do not show figures for the retail sector separately.

The employment figures of the National Social Security Office (ONSS) of 30 June 1989 give a general idea of the composition of the labour force for NACE codes 64 and 65, excluding codes 651 and 652 (for NACE see Section 1). Wage earners (totalling about 150,000) are broken down by gender (male/female), working hours (full-time/part-time) and type of employment (blue-collar/white-collar workers).

Table 6 shows the significance of the retail sector within the private sector as a whole.

Table 6 – Wage-earners in the retail sector as a percentage of all wage-earners in the private sector, broken down

Category	Percentage of total
Male	2.65%
Female	8.07%
White-collar	6.53%
Blue-collar	2.35%
Total retail trade	4.80%

Source: ONSS, 1989

Table 4 – Retail trade: Breakdown of wage earners by gender, working time and type of employment

White-collar workers	Male	Female	Total
Part-time	3,482	48,876	52,358
Full-time	27,600	37,719	65,319
Total	31,082	86,595	117,677
Blue-collar workers	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Part-time	3,031	7,716	10,747
Full-time	14,983	4,420	19,403
Total (white and blue-collar)	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Part-time	6,513	56,592	63,105
Full-time	42,583	42,139	84,722
Total	49,199	98,810	148,009

Source: ONSS, 1989

The same data, expressed in percentages, is given in Table 5.

Table 5 – Retail sector compared with private sector as a whole – percentage of wage-earners broken down by gender, working hours and type of work

	Retail trade	Total private sector
Male	33.2%	60.3%
Female	66.8%	39.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Part-time	42.7%	21.1%
Full-time	57.3%	78.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
White-collar	79.5%	58.4%
Blue-collar	20.4%	41.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: ONSS, 1989

The retail trade is a female-dominated sector where most employees are white-collar and part-time work is the rule. 58.2% of female workers work part-time compared with only 10% of men.

So far we have only considered people in employment. However, the self-employed also represent a substantial proportion of the people working in this sector. Because the self-employed are subject to a quite different social security regime they are not covered by ONSS statistics. To obtain the total number of people working in the sector, therefore, we have referred to the data provided by the Retail Traders Federation (FEDIS).

Table 7 – Total of people working in the retail trade in 1988

	Number	Percentage
Employed	165,058	66.2%
Self-employed	84,169	33.8%
Total	249,227	100.0%

Source: FEDIS, 1991

Although the motor vehicle and fuels segments are recorded separately, the number of people employed is higher than that shown in the ONSS figures. One possible explanation is that part-timers working for two separate firms have been counted twice.

Table 7 also shows the heavy weighting of self-employed in the retail trade.

In its last annual report (1991) the Retail Traders Federation set out data permitting a comparison of the workforce by segment of the retail trade for the years 1976, 1982, 1987 and 1988. These figures show a sustained growth in the retail trade workforce which contrasts with the decrease in the wholesale sector, However, it does not provide any information on subjects such as possible concentration, specialization etc.

There is no point in making a more detailed analysis. To add the data collected by the various social insurance funds in the sector would make for further confusion. However, to illustrate some of the trends in the retail sector referred to in point 2, we compare the trend of the workforce during the eighties as shown by the figures of three different social insurance funds.

Table 8 - Workforce in the retail sector as a whole and its various segments 1976-1988

	1976	1982	1987	1988
Retail trade				
People employed				
food	41,315	52,825	68,053	73,346
non-food	53,284	53,793	57,641	64,246
varied products	41,005	41,520	27,695	27,466
motor vehicles	5,712	3,602	3,734	4,397
pharmacies	6,532	7,138	7,869	8,581
Total	147,448	158,878	164,992	178,036
Self-employed				
food	34,754	29,800	28,026	26,662
non-food	46,547	49,714	56,317	56,490
varied products	909	942	988	1,017
motor vehicles	10,378	10,757	11,359	10,246
pharmacies	2,787	2,294	2,245	2,071
Total	95,375	93,507	98,935	96,666
Total retail trade	242,823	252,385	263,927	274,702
Total wholesale trade	196,701	183,737	192,919	201,833
Total wholesale/retail trade	439,524	436,122	456,846	476,535

Source: Central Council for the Economy quoted by FEDIS

Table 9 - Comparison of number of employed coming under three social insurance funds 1981-1990 (estimates)

	1981	1985	1990
Large specialist retail firms	12,100	13,200	15,100
Food multiples	23,000	26,000	28,800
Large mutiple dept. stores	38,200	33,000	27,850

Source: Social insurance funds quoted by FEDIS, 1991.

Table 10 - Employment (wage-earners) in the food sector by size of enterprise (1989)

Size	Number of employers	Employees	Percentage total
1 - 4 employees	2,019	3,195	7.1
5 - 9	324	2,159	4.8
10 - 19	300	4,215	9.3
20 - 49	238	7,070	15.6
50 - 99	11	673	1.5
100 - 199	4	562	1.2
200 - 499	6	2,480	5.4
500 - 999	5	3,440	7.6
1,000 +	6	21,311	47.2
Total	2,913	45,105	100.0

Source: Social Fund food distribution + our own calculations

Table 9 shows that some older forms of retailing, notably the large retail chains, are in decline while the large specialist stores and food multiples, many of which are SMEs, are doing well.
Small and very large firms together account for most of the workforce. Companies employing 20–49 staff reflect the boom in franchising while the intermediate classes 50-99 and 100-199 are poorly represented.

4.2 Conditions of employment

The publications of Valenduc and Vendramin of 1991 and of Vendramin in 1990 give some idea of working conditions in the retail sector in general and different aspects of part-time working in particular. With the support of the Fondation Travail et Université, the authors organized a survey in the French-speaking part of Belgium from which they drew the following conclusions:

- The sector appears to be a model of flexibility in that only 44% of people employed have fixed working hours (only 33% in the case of part-timers).
- 58% of those surveyed work part-time (70% of female respondents).
- Employees with a heavy part-time weighting are the cashiers who are almost exclusively women, and window dressers.
- Two-thirds of part-time workers work between 18 and 24 hours a week.
- 41% of part-timers would like to work full-time.
- 69% of those with variable working hours would like to have fixed hours.

Another point emerging is the change in the type of work because of the changes in the way of working and particularly the introduction of new technology. Valenduc and Vendramin quote the example of electronic bar code scanning which affects the working conditions of cashiers, who are incidentally often female. Thus, in the organizational chart cashiers take the place formerly occupied by shop assistants. Furthermore, contacts with customers have become de-personalized, tasks have become automated and the job of selling has been reduced to purely technical aspects. The job of informing and persuading customers has disappeared and is now taken over by sales promotion personnel. The same phenomenon is noted for aspects such as putting goods on display, packaging etc.

However, collecting money from customers is a key function in the process. For this reason the management has developed a system of work control and reduced autonomy to an absolute minimum. This is the function of electronic scanning. Reading the price of products could not be left to the cashier because of the enormous number of products passing through her checkout. Even so, not everything is a gain. Increased absenteeism and psychological problems (headaches, back trouble, tiredness) reflect the need to analyze job satisfaction and ergonomics. Job satisfaction is low because of the monotonous, repetitive nature of the work. Moreover, medical opinion is against asymmetrical body movements and environmental problems such as noise. The stress resulting from fear of making mistakes with money can be considerable.
Because of the changes under way and faced with problems such as franchising where the legal situation makes it possible to escape from certain social security obligations, the unions, fearing a social deregulation of the retail trade, decided in 1992 to organize an awareness campaign for employees in the retail sector. In fact, more and more large firms are being divided up into legally independent branches, are entrusting more and more tasks to smaller firms and exploiting the possibilities of subcontracting.

According to the unions, working conditions in firms coming under the employer/employee committee for the retail trade are less attractive than in other areas. Thus, in the large stores employees work 36 hours a week of 4 1/2 days and wages are 20 to 30% higher than those in the independent retail sector, where people are expected to work up to 40 hours a week. Because of these differences the unions have demanded that an employer/employee committee covering the wholesale and retail sector be set up in the longer term and for the immediate future are asking for a reduction in the number of working hours to 36 hours a week, an increase in wage scales and formal union recognition. The unions have also made various proposals for changes in the responsibilities of the employer/employee committees, particularly as regards franchisees.
The Belgian Retail Traders Federation opposes these proposals and stresses that franchisees are independent retailers who have freely signed a commercial contract.

5. CHANGES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

Valenduc and Vendramin (1991) considered the strategies used by firms to expand their market shares – association through holding companies, global market strategies, diversification, product standardization etc. They conclude that technological changes that will have a significant impact on qualifications required are on the cards. These include electronic payments, networked services and the like. There is a serious lack of data as to the qualifications themselves.

Most of the technology recently introduced has tended to be Tayloristic and to separate intellectual and manual functions, allocate different tasks to different people, and control performance. Compared with the manufacturing sector this process has come about fairly late. Its impact on qualifications is complex. We shall not enter into a detailed discussion here – particularly because we have not sufficient information from which to generalize. The overall trend may be summarized as a demand for qualifications on the part of a smaller segment of the personnel – mainly managers and executives – and a deterioration in working conditions for the majority. The case of the cashiers' work referred to in Section 4 is a good example of this deterioration.

One way of improving qualifications, though not thought desirable by the personnel, could be conceived as part of the tendency of managers to make all employees conscious of the need for market and customer-awareness. A case study carried out in 1990 on the work of employed persons (D'Hertefelt et Pollet, 1990) showed that in addition to their traditional tasks, more and more employees are finding themselves entrusted with commercial tasks, such as seeking customers, after-sales service, dealing with complaints, etc. In the larger firms particularly a number of staff are taking language courses or courses in communication techniques, distance marketing etc. This study was not carried out for a specific economic sector and in our view the retail sector (and particularly the SMEs) are not exactly in the avantgarde of such developments.

6. TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

1.

This chapter deals with the education system in general and aspects particularly relevant to the retail sector.

6.1 The Belgian educational system

The law of 20 June 1983 raised the age for compulsory full-time schooling to 16, to be followed by a period of full-time or part-time schooling until the age of 18. Until then school attendance had only been compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14.
Now, therefore, a period of compulsory full-time schooling is followed by another period of schooling which is at least part-time. The obligation to attend part-time education can be fulfilled either by attending full-time secondary courses or by attending part-time courses, or again by training courses recognized as fulfilling the requirements of compulsory schooling (Debaty, 1987).
The process of extending the period of education went hand in hand with efforts to develop a system of industrial apprenticeship. Moreover, there already exist means of occupying young people as ONEM trainees, which traditionally results in the employment of many young people. Generally these schemes involve temporary employment. However, the number of such jobs has decreased since 1986 (Michiels, 1988).
Today, therefore, secondary education is entirely compulsory. Thanks in partly to the increase in disposable incomes, from 1960 onwards, a movement towards democratization of secondary education gradually gained ground and in 20 years resulted in a complete reform of secondary education.
Among the French-speaking community the years 1982 to 1983 marked the shift from traditional education (Type II) to new reformed education (Type I). In practice this transition is far from complete, particularly among the Flemish-speaking community. This is explainable particularly by the slowness to adapt of Catholic schools, which are in a comfortable majority in Flanders and to a lesser degree also in Wallonia and Brussels.

Traditional secondary education (Type II) comprises:

• *General education* with its classical side (Latin and Greek), its modern side (Mathematics and Science) and Economics. It breaks down into two periods of three years (lower secondary education and upper secondary education). Lower secondary education is equivalent to the former middle school and when successful, leads to the award of a certificate. Higher secondary education offers few prospects in job terms, except perhaps the possibility of becoming a clerk in the Civil Service, and mainly serves to prepare pupils for higher education, particularly the Universities.

• *Technical education* also lasts 6 years (two periods of 3 years) and can lead to the award of certificates in a wide number of fields such as mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, building, chemistry and secretarial work. These technical courses also prepare pupils for higher education.

• *Vocational education* follows on from primary education but generally follows a course identical with that of the first years of technical education. It lays great stress on trade apprenticeships and allows pupils to enter the labour market with practical vocational experience. This education lasts 4, 5 or 6 years with the last 2 years of the 6-year period being used to improve practical skills.
These different channels are intended to allow each pupil to choose the type of course that appeals to him most and is in line with his interests and intellectual and manual aptitudes. However, the choice very often reflects a child's social origins.
The educational reform, although notable for the updating of courses and methods, also involved a process of democratization whose principal objective was to create a system for social advancement and open the way to higher education and the university for the more disadvantaged classes.
The new system differs radically from the previous one in that in the long term it replaces it with a single system covering 6 years (3 x 2 years) with a wide range of different courses. Each pupil can now put together his own individual course programme as a function of his ability, tastes and personal aptitudes. At the end of the 6-year period the system leads to the award of the same certificate for everyone and allows acccess to higher education including university.

Because a number of pupils leave primary school at the age of 13 whatever their level of performance, a transitional year – known as the "année d'accueil" was introduced to bridge the gap between primary school and secondary school. This transitional year is also open to children who have not made up their minds, do not yet show sufficient maturity and/or have certain handicaps. At the end of the transitional year an adolescent may transfer to the "observation cycle" together with other pupils coming directly from primary school, or may opt to start vocational training immediately.
Most children after gaining a certificate of primary education at the age of 12 embark upon the so-called "observation cycle" which lasts 2 years. This involves a special training programme in general, technical or artistic subjects. During the first 2 years any kind of reorientation is possible without holding the child back. Psychologists and social workers assist the child and its parents to make their choice and to revise it if necessary.

At the end of the observation cycle the pupil selects a general programme which may continue on the same lines as his first choice or diverge from it. He now embarks on a cycle of general, technical or vocational education lasting 2 years. This consists of a general educational course and a special course partly influenced by the main subjects chosen and partly a personal choice. The last year of the cycle in particular may be considered as reorientation towards technical education. This cycle may also lead to a year of additional education or mark the end of school or the start of an apprenticeship. At this stage there is a wider choice of activities (manual work, sport, special subjects etc.) and supplementary courses, but current financial restrictions have caused these to be suspended for the time being.
Once a pupil has completed his cycle of general, technical, or vocational courses with, in some cases

a final year of reorientation, he embarks on the third final cycle lasting two years leading to a certificate of secondary education. In manual and technical subjects it is always possible to review initial choices and to supplement them with additional training. In the case of the more general or specialist programmes larger schools offer a number of courses with a variety of options.
The 6-year vocational education course begins with the first observation year but also accepts pupils from general and technical courses at the end of the first, fourth, or sixth years. In some cases it can also allow pupils to have access to these courses as a result of reorientation and possibly also to additional courses.
Among the courses preparing pupils for specific jobs in the retail trade we may mention:

- At technical secondary level: Commercial and language courses and a year specializing in the retail and wholesale trades.

- At vocational secondary level: Courses in office work, selling, window-dressing, the clothing trade and a year of specialization in commercial management.

6.2 Apprenticeship

The Law of 29 June 1983 on extending the duration of compulsory education led to a change in the activity of the French and Dutch-speaking Institutes of Permanent Education for the Middle Classes and SMEs.
Whereas in the past an apprenticeship contract could start at the age of 14, the new law requires that all young people attend full-time education until the age of 16. This eliminates potential apprentices of 14 and 15 years. However, the system has been rendered more flexible in that it now permits young people of 16 to 18 to fulfil the part-time education requirement by entering into an apprenticeship contract with an employer (practical training) coupled with a theoretical course in a training centre for the "middle classes".
This system of sandwich training has long been a traditional part of the Belgian vocational training system (1959). In fact, as in most other European countries it is based on the system of on-the-job training under the supervision of skilled workers or employers who pass their know-how on to the apprentice. These trainers-employers have been increasingly assisted in their training task by trainers giving technical courses of between 72 and 124 hours a year and general courses of between 72 and 132 hours a year.
All this boils down to an initial vocational training which at present lasts for a maxiumum of (4 years taking account of the temporary provisions of the law on the extension of compulsory education). After the age of 18 an apprentice may continue his training by following a basic management course while remaining a blue-collar or white-collar worker and signing a training agreement for a period of 2 years.
Other types of apprenticeship exist in other fields of employment (Law of 19 August 1983).
Clearly, an apprenticeship followed by basic management training and the conclusion of a training agreement may serve as a form of vocational training for the retail trade.
A first study of this type of training was carried out by Bragard in 1987. He studied a sample of 2,200 former apprentices, 16.5% of whom had been apprentices in the retail sector (4.1% female). Those questioned had completed their apprenticeship between 1979 and 1985. In 1987, when the survey was conducted, 16.7% were out of work, the highest rate of any sector studied. Thus, while young Belgians may serve an apprenticeship in order to work in the retail sector, they are not automatically guaranteed employment.
A second study on the middle class course of training was carried out by Bragard in 1992. This yielded two important facts:

- This apprenticeship system is becoming less and less a means of qualification for the disadvantaged classes. The proportion of children from the wealthier classes – children of executives, teachers, professionals and managers – obtaining a certificate of apprenticeship is as high as 23% whereas the proportion of workers' children is only 32%;

- On the other hand, there is a large proportion of workers' children (32%) and farmers' children (8%), among those following a basic management training course. This type of course is thus a means of social advancement.

The following four pages give an overall view of the secondary education situation in the French community in Belgium and reflect the complexity of the system. These pages have been taken from an "Employment/Training" seminar organized by the CSC Metalworkers of Liège on 22 May 1992 on the subject "Partners for sandwich training".

6.3 Continuing training

Continuing training may be defined as training which is not provided for the school system and which permits a student to enhance his chances of finding suitable employment or improve his vocational qualifications. Those taking part in continuing training may or may not have a job. Those out of work may take part in training as long as they are available to take a job when offered.
Three categories of continuing training may be distinguished on the basis of the bodies involved:

- Social advancement courses
- Vocational training organized by ONEM (FOREM, VDAB and ORBEM)
- Other training courses (6.4).

6.3.1 Social advancement courses

These courses are usually referred to as evening classes. At the beginning of the seventies the law on crediting working hours enabled an employee to attend courses organized by teaching institutions recognized by the Ministries of Education and Employment and to absent himself from work with no loss of salary. The system was financed 50% by the state and 50% by employers via a special social security contribution. This type of training, although very promising in the first years of its existence, only

attracted about 10% of potential beneficiaries and by the end of the decade was not proving very successful.
During the eighties a number of ministerial initiatives were taken to boost the system. Credits for working hours were replaced by the "training leave" and the effect was immediate. About 100,000 students have registered for such courses, most of them for language courses. Other courses have been mainly of a general nature. Recent statistics show a gradual drop in student numbers as the course level rises because registration fees have been substantially increased.

Table 11 – Participation in social advancement courses

Level	Year 1	2	3	4
Lower vocational training	17,716	55%	25%	5%
Lower technical training	1,711	74%	–	13%
Higher vocational training	2,874	58%	33%	6%
Higher technical training	7,381	49%	33%	6%
Total (excluding language courses)	29,682	55%	32%	6%

Source. P. Debaty, CEDEFOP, 1987

6.3.2 The Public Employment and Training Service (ONEM)

ONEM's vocational training courses and those of its regional offices employ some 1,200 trainers spread over some 60 training centres in which more than 50 trades and other occupations are taught and in which various new qualifications may be acquired. These trainers may work in organized teams within training centres or may collaborate with other trainers in firms, independent training centres recognized as efficient, in schools, universities, specialized centres etc.
Training provided by ONEM may be organized in different ways and managed directly or jointly with firms.

VDAB – the Flemish-speaking Public Employment and Training Service – organizes specific courses for check-out operators.

6.4 Other forms of continuing training

Recent years have seen a veritable proliferation of initiatives covering various types of training for adults. A certain number of these derive from the continuous training organized for middle classes and are basically targeted at executives and managers of small and medium-size enterprises. 64% of those taking part in such training courses are managers of SMEs (Bragard, 1990). In another study (Bragard, 1991), about 100 heads of SMEs were questioned on the subject of their attendance of continuing training courses. 35% of them attended a course of this type at least once a year, 23% less than once a year and 42% never. The apparent lack of interest in such initiatives well reflects the predominant style of management in SMEs.

As far as the 0.25% measure is concerned (see Section 3.2), 0.04% was provided to finance training leave for part-time employees. There is no information as to how far such projects were actually realized.

7. ISSUES

In assessing the examples of the case studies that are worth following, account must be taken of differences in size, the effect of innovation and the institutional framework(s). To ignore these questions would risk making any comments stemming from these studies obsolescent or irrelevant.

– Historically, the inflow of substantial capital to the trade sector, particually the retail trade, came fairly late. Even today it is easy to descry in the retail sector the industrial economic activity of concentration, division between manufacturing and sale, and internationalization. Within this process the SMEs would seem to be standing up well, even though the SME formula is losing something of its attractions (hence franchising ...). However, divergence is imminent and differences in size reflect in the number of areas of management in these firms. Training and education may concern the larger firms. SMEs on the other hand show little interest.

– MOK (1982) studied the introduction of microelectronics to the retail sector and its social consequences. These were found to be work impoverishment, as in the case of check-out operators, employees becoming interchangeable and replaceable without difficulty, increased managerial control, ergonomic problems, and, above all, a change in the demand for work. 80% of sales jobs are occupied by women. They are more disciplined, keener to work part-time and – because they are more plentiful on the labour market – less demanding.

However, while certain types of job are unfavourably affected by innovation, others are upgraded because of the qualifications required (language and communication skills). Thus, the design and scope of training and education can widen the gap between the privileged and the large mass of people. It is time to realise that some people gain in qualification by carrying out their work while others gain nothing and thus occupy a position on the labour market that is permanently vulnerable. Unless training initiatives are tailored to natural abilities, they can simply widen the gap.

There is a growing tendency to adopt any type of sectoral policy on training and education on the basis of an agreement between the social partners. Before applauding this policy it is important to bear in mind the ground swell of opinion. It is logical to recommend a plan of training, incentives, coordination, greater access to training, but what happens if the horse is taken to water but refuses to drink? At individual firm level, and especially in the case of SMEs, the social partners have very little to say on these matters of vital importance. There is little doubt that matters such as innovation and training are decided on informally with an eye to the return in the short term. The trainer does what he has to, but money ultimately decides.

PART 2:

Group X

Louis Delhaize Group

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

GROUP X

2.

UNIVERSITE DE LIEGE
Centre de Recherche &
de Documentation PME
Liège, 11 May 1992

1. General description of company X

1.1 Brief outline

Formed	: 92 years ago
Legal status	: Société anonyme (company with liability limited by shares)
Equity held by	: Family
Capital	: Ecu 6.4 million (Bfrs 255.366.000) in December 1990
Business	: Retail supermarkets
Type of products	: Mainly food
Location	: 47 supermarkets, mainly around headquarters
Personnel	: 2000 (half part-timers)
Market share	: 2.5% of the Belgian market; 8.6% of the regional market

Non-consolidated sales : Bfrs 13 billion in 1991

1.2 History of the company and recent strategy developments

In 1900, Mr. Albert X set himself up in an industrial area of southern Belgium by taking over a smoked food business. He soon expanded into fruit and vegetable wholesaling and even set up a morning market, after which he branched out into general groceries.

On the founder's death in 1929 his two sons, Bernard and Christian, took over the responsibility for the family business. Under the provisions of their father's will each in turn assumed management for a period of nine years, beginning with the elder soon, Bernard. The younger worked for him and created a coffee roasting unit.

In 1936 the two brothers got together to transform the legal form of the business and form a private limited company under the name "SPRL X Frères"; they developed their wholesale activity by delivering goods to concessionaires using the "X" name.

1941 saw another change in the legal form to respond to the needs of growth and the SPRL became a société anonyme (company with liability limited by shares). From then on, the company's target was to expand its activities by creating new concessionaires and a few branches.

By 1955 the company had grown into a major chain of affiliated concessionaires and about fifty small branches. Annual sales had reached Bfrs 120 million and the number of staff 163.

In 1957, as a first experiment in the area, the largest branch was transformed into a self-service store with a sales floor of 200 sq. metres. The elder brother, Bernard, who was less inclined to take risks, withdrew from the business and was bought out by his brother Christian. Since the self-service and supermarket experiments were so successful the small stores were gradually abolished and replaced by supermarkets.

In 1962 the company created its first supermarket, with a butcher's department. Sales had by this time reached Bfrs 26 million and the number of staff 435. Between 1962 and 1965 Christian was joined by his three sons (Daniel, Etienne and François).

In 1971 the firm moved out into the suburbs on a 22 hectare site at the junction of two motorways, where it set up its head office and warehouses. The site and the structure of the buildings was chosen in order to allow the accommodation for the different departments to be doubled or even tripled in time. One year later sales has risen to Bfrs 1.750 million and the number of staff to 842. Three years later the warehouse was reorganized and its capacity doubled.

By 1976 sales were running at Bfrs 3 billion and the comany had 1450 employees. In 1977, to enable growth to be properly managed and controlled, the company split up into four new companies: Company X (the present case study) continued its trading activity. This is the only one to which we shall refer here. By 1978 Company X sales were topping Bfrs 6 billion and the staff numbered more than 1600. By the following year the traditional stores had completely disappeared and the number of supermarkets had reached 34.

In 1982 sales had reached Bfrs 7 billion and the number of staff 1675. In 1991 sales were Bfrs 13 billion and staff 2000, half of them part-timers.

Three factors favoured the group's growth

According to Daniel X (3rd generation) the company benefited from a combination of three favourable factors:

1. *At a commercial level: The emergence of self-service stores*

The emergence of self-service stores and, particularly, the decision of Christian X as early as 1957 to test out this new system in their biggest branch. After a one-year trial period he considered the system to be a success and gradually and with determination steered the company towards this new form of marketing. Small traditional stores with sales floors of 40 sq. metres were gradually shut down and supermarkets took over. Initially supermarkets had sales floors of between 300 and 400 sq. metres but later the sales floors increased to between 700 and 800 sq. metres. Currently the optimum sales floor is approximately 1500 sq. metres.

2. *At a financial level: Self-financing*

Although the self-service experiment involved a commercial risk, the fact that the trial was financed by the company itself meant that no financial risk was involved.

3. *At management level: A succession of good managers*

Christian's three sons reached an age and had the necessary experience to join the family business and

assist their father just at a time when new opportunities presented themselves. The impetus lent by youthful dynamism, as also the sharing of tasks and responsibilities, enabled the company to meet the new challenges.
Favourable market circumstances, a solid financial base and fresh blood enabled the company to make progress, However another essential factor should not be passed over in silence, namely the entrepreneurial and family spirit of the managers.

Recent strategy developments
As the single European market gets underway in 1993 the managers of Company X have a well defined new strategy in the same three areas:

1. *Marketing: Quality and consumer proximity*
The company remains faithful to its core activity – the retailing mainly of food products. It believes that consumers will in future look increasingly for quality and not automatically the cheapest products. As a result it has been decided to put even more emphasis on quality and freshness of goods, to introduce delicatessen counters and to encourage more customer contact and counselling. More than ever the company keeps up the tradition begun by Christian X at the beginning of the thirties, of roasting its own brand coffee and bottling its own wine. It is regarded as particularly important that supermarkets with the ideal sales floor of around 1500 sq. metres should be located close to their customers and offer parking facilities.

2. *Finance: Cost control*
The company aims to ensure profitability through strict cost control, taking advantage of new technology: - Computerized check-outs with optical scanning systems (installed between 1984 and 1989), - Computerized management facilities for purchase, stock management at the central warehouse, deliveries, supermarkets and general services. These technologies make it possible to establish a position at any time. In other words, the company seeks to combine profitability and profit with self-financing and growth.

3. *Management: Accent on motivation and competence*
In the not-too-distant future the fourth generation of the family (nine sons and daughters) will be called upon to take over management of the group. The three third-generation managers have agreed upon the standards that the young people will have to meet in order to be eligible for a position at the head of the company. Qualifications include a diploma of higher studies, a training period of two years in another company, and proficiency in foreign languages such as English, Dutch and German.

The decision to keep the company as a family firm was not an easy one because it assumes that competent and motivated managers will be found within the family. There is no obligatory succession, given the financial arrangement which has been made to ensure that nobody suffers. Management and assets have been clearly separated.

1.3 Structure of the company
This is a family firm managed by the principal members of the family, the originality of the organization lies particularly in the way in which managerial responsibilities are shared out. It is therefore useful to name the people involved and their relationships.

a. Board of directors
Four members of the X family:
- Christian X (the founder's son)
- Daniel X Three sons of
- Etienne X Christian X
- François X (3rd generation)

b. General management
From the point of view of organization, general management is at two levels:

1. Management Committee: All decisions are taken by the three brothers in common agreement.
2. The division of managerial tasks and responsibilities is clear:

- Administrative and financial department: Mr. Daniel X, managing director and spokesman for the group
- Fresh produce department: Mr. Etienne X
- Dry goods department: Mr. François X

and
- Coffee and wine department: Mr. Christian X
- Supermarkets: Mr. Georges X (4th generation)

The fresh produce and dry goods departments each have their own purchasing, sales, storage and transport networks. They also show the usual distinction between administrative and executive staff. Mr. Daniel X is responsible for the personnel department and a training unit was set up within this department two years ago.

c. Supermarket structure

It is interesting to detail the chain of command and responsibilities within a sales outlet, because, in the final analysis, the clients only have to deal with the supermarket personnel. Moreover, the training organized by the company is mainly for staff working in stores. The average number of people working in a supermarket varies from 50 to 65, depending on sales volume and working hours chosen by the personnel. As shown above, the supermarket is divided into 10 departments for management purposes.

1.4 Size and location

This family group belongs to the Belgian clan of large multiple retailers, although neither its size nor its market share are comparable to those of the market leader. In the food sector (in the broad sense of the term), the company has 2.5% of the market. The large and medium-sized retail chains together have an 80% share of the food retail market in Belgium.

One has to be cautious when comparing firms which do not offer the same range of products. Group X mainly sells food products. The number of sales outlets is another element which must also be taken into account when comparing chains or groups.

The group currently owns 47 supermarkets, most of which are situated within 80 km of head office.

When considering growth in the number of supermarkets over the last two years, one could be misled into thinking that the company has been stagnating. The contrary is the case. In order to be better prepared for the European market in 1993 and to improve profitability, company X in 1988 embarked on a modernization programme. This explains why in three years it closed 9 sales outlets and replaced them with 6 new supermarkets which better meet the requirements of the market (better location with parking facilities, larger sales area etc.). Nine other sales outlets, which were very outmoded given the company's new strategy, received a complete face-lift.

About 10 new supermarkets are planned. The group intends to extend its sphere of activities to other areas of Wallonia, to the capital and to Flanders. The geographical siting of stores is carried out gradually and carefully, so that no new sales outlet is ever too far from another and can receive help if problems arise.

In November 1989, the retail journal "Distribution aujourd'hui" published a survey of large and medium-size retail firms in Belgium, conducted by International Marketing & Management Dynamics (Brussels), based on the figures for 1987. This survey showed the average sales figure per square metre of sales floor, as Bfrs 188.000. By these standards company X comes off well with a figure of Bfrs 252.000, while the company with the largest market share is just below the average at Bfrs 182.000 per sq. metre.

1.5 Personnel

On 31 December 1991, the company employed 2.039 people, more than half of whom were working part-time.

a. Staff growth vs Sales

Year	Number of persons	Sales in Bfrs m
1955	163	120
1962	435	260
1972	842	1,750
1982	1,675	7,000
1990	2,000	9,073
1991	2,039	13,000

b. Staff breakdown

By age group		By length of service	
Under 21	40	Under 1 year	222
21 to 25	366	1 to 5 years	607
26 to 30	570	6 to 10 years	412
31 to 40	742	11 to 20 years	702
41 to 50	246	21 to 30 years	88
51 or over	75	31 to 40 years	8
	2,039		2,039

By weekly working hours		By nationality	
Under 20	92	Belgian	1,765
20 hours	888	Italian	212
24 to 30	262		
36 to 38	618	Other EC	51
41 to 50	179	Non-EC	11
	2,039		2,039

c. Female personnel and turnover

Women represent about three-quarters of the total workforce.

Staff turnover is around 10% per year, i.e. some 200 persons leaving and 200 recruited (disregarding the usual interruptions for illness, pregnancy etc.). The highest staff turnover is among female personnel.

1.6 Working conditions

The general working conditions and benefits (working hours, wages, holidays, special holidays, arrangements in case of illness etc.) are based on the collective agreements for the retail sector.

The dialogue between unions and management is direct and functions well for two reasons: on the one hand the main union representative has been working with the company for a long time and has lived through the growth of the company in close contact with the management. On the other hand the company is permeated by family spirit.

Supermarket opening hours may vary according to the needs of the market, including local custom and competition. Generally speaking they open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Saturday, as do their competitors. Some stores open in the evening.

Although supermarkets only open at 9 a.m., work begins at 6 a.m. in the grocery department, which also includes goods handling. The fresh produce departments (fish, bread etc.) start work at 7 a.m.

Deliveries of goods have to be checked and shelves and counters prepared.
The working hours of supermarket personnel depend on the manager or the head of department. As we have seen above (Section 1.5) the majority of people work part-time. Nearly all of these are women.
On average 20% of staff in a supermarket work full-time and 80% part-time. The minimum number ofworking hours is 20 hours a week on a flexible schedule with a minimum of 3 hours a day. A shorter working period would make it almost impossible to organize staff working hours and would harm both the management of the stores and service to customers.
The system of flexible working hours is difficult to manage and to control but it does offer great advantages to the people concerned. This is particularly true of women who do not see their work as a career opportunity but a means of supplementing family income and do not wish to disturb their family life.

1.7 Recruitment

Recruitment of personnel for the head office and general and administrative departments does not apparently pose any problems. Recruiting requirements are very demanding as regards the ability and motivation of future employees.
The situation is very different in the case of supermarket personnel. It is traditionally felt by the public at large and potential employees themselves that no particular qualifications are needed to become a sales assistant or a cashier. Learning is by oral instruction on the job.
While work in a retail store originally required very little training if any, increasing technology, competition and a concern for profitability require that personnel have a minimum basic training in management techniques. As the head of the personnel department put it "Not everyone can be a greengrocer".
At present recruits still tend to be people with a low level of education – a maximum of one or two years' vocational or technical education or even only primary education, with no formal qualification and no school leaving certificate.
People newly employed have a probation period of six months during which they are given basic training of one to three months. At the end of the training period a person's work performance and abilities are evaluated by his direct superiors using a standard assessment form.
Internal promotion is possible but tends to be rare, at least in the case of women workers, not so much out of principle as because of a lack of candidates having or wishing to acquire the qualifications necessary for the job. As far as managerial staff is concerned promotion is limited by the fact that the top posts are not accessible to them. There are few examples of anyone being promoted from the supermarkets to head office, and according to union representatives there is little chance of anyone rising from a cashier's job to become assistant manager.

1.8 Comments

Company X has a good corporate image in its area both as an employer and from the point of view of the goods themselves. Like most companies in the retail sector Company X has difficulty recruiting qualified personnel for its sales assistants jobs in the supermarkets. The head of the personnel department pointed out that a distinction should be made between qualified people and people holding a certificate or diploma. Because of the rapid growth of the company and the introduction of new technologies it is becoming essential to review the problem of staff training.

2. Training policy

2.1 Training policy: history and current situation

The radical changes in the job of retail sales assistant that have come about over the past thirty years or so as a result of the emergence of self-service stores and supermarkets has at Company X gone hand in hand with a change in the network of outlets – the concessionaires and branches have been shut down. These changes have led to a policy of rapid but controlled growth. Until very recently the company had no long-term policy on training matters because the need for such a policy had not yet been felt. Only very recently has a training policy been conceived and formalized (see c. below).
Over the past few years Company X has carried out a number of specific training courses, some of which have been regarded as successful. They will be continued and included in the overall training programme (see point b. below).
Other less successful experiments (see point a. below) were aimed at training young recruits or offering the more disadvantaged a chance to make good by giving them the possibility of being employed at the end of their apprenticeship. The X family has always been very involved in the social and economic life of the region. Thus, apart from the difficulties encountered in recruiting butchers' assistants, the social implications are a major contributing factor in their involvement in the training programme for this segment.

a. Unsuccessful experiments

- With a continuous training centre for the middle classes: Apprenticeship training and management training This experiment was abandoned for two reasons:

  - There is no apprentice category in this sector and its inclusion would involve technical difficulties.

  - Trainees showed no difference in their way of thinking or behaving at the end of the programme; the lack of motivation was even more noticeable.

- Computer-assisted training in the field of personnel management. This was not used because the terminals or PCs were too often in use and therefore not available when staff might have benefited from the CBT system.

- Industrial apprenticeship. This proved not to be feasible because of the lack of agreement on the

part of the social partners.

- Individual Professional Training (IPT). The results were very disappointing. Moreover there are no specialized training centres for certain jobs such as sales assistant and cashier, who thus have to be trained by the company.

- Sandwich training for butchers' assistants (2 year programme in collaboration with a school and other firms in the area). 17 young people began the course but only 2 are completing it, one of whom still poses problems. The reasons for the failure are as follows:

  - The school did not recruit well: there were no selection criteria or required minimum education;

  - Young people without motivation coming from the high risk social groups Cost: Bfrs 1,500,000 paid in wages to the young people, without allowing for the cost of trainers.

b. Successful experiments that are being pursued
Because of the success of experiments the four training courses listed below will be continued and included in the overall training programme:

- Staff versatility course
- Fresh produce course
- Potential managers' course
- Wine counsellor course

Whether or not the sandwich training course for SME management set up in collaboration with 11 firms in the area will be continued will depend upon the agreement of the various partners. Company X favours the idea.

c. The new training policy
The company's new commercial strategy not only called for a staff training policy but also one that was an integral part of the strategy. By the year 2000 an X supermarket will be a luxury store with fresh produce of irreproachable quality, where price is not the governing factor and where the accent is on a friendly atmosphere and personal contact between staff and customers.

The first objective is: *to sell better and serve the client better.*

Moreover, at the level of internal organization emphasis is on the strict management of supermarkets, particularly as regards the correct use of data processing, a thorough knowledge of products, stock management and control of losses on perishable goods, as also on personnel management.

The second objective is: *to manage better.*

To achieve these objectives the company needs qualified and able personnel. However the basis for recruitment of sales staff is still fairly low – in other words the gap between supply and demand is growing. Similarly staff already in place need to acquire greater skills through knowledge, improved know-how and greater motivation as management techniques and equipment become increasingly sophisticated.

There are three training levels to acquire competence.
- A technical knowledge of products = knowledge.
- Correct use of computers by management = knowhow.
- Interpersonal skills.

Three key words
- Thoroughness: to be sure of having all the elements needed.
- Accuracy: in work and in particularly in work with computers.
- Flexibility: to be open-minded and open to everyone.

People concerned: All supermarket staff, hence some 1,685 people. Training is compulsory for everyone.

Bonus: The management hopes that these objectives will be attained and that this kind of training will also create a good basis for internal promotion.

Timing: Training will be spread over three years. The programme is aimed at the staff as a whole and will involve training at six levels as shown in the following table.
The first training course that will be operational in this wide-ranging programme is the training for cashiers. This is scheduled to begin in late March 1992. Details of the training course are given in Section 2.5.

2.2 Training structure: history and current situation

A training unit has been created within the personnel department which comes directly under the administrative and financial director (Mr. Daniel X). As already mentioned, this unit is new and has only existed for a year.
After a number of disappointments the management decided that training courses should be organized and run within the firm, although the possibility of using outside specialists for specific purposes should not be ruled out.
The overall cost of the training programme for all supermarket staff is estimated as Bfrs 60 million, namely:

- Bfrs 50 million for allowances to trainees, and
- Bfrs 10 million in allowances for trainers.

2.3 Impact of new technologies on training

It was the need for professional skills in the use of new technologies that triggered the creation of training courses and that has been satisfied. Experience has shown that incorrect use of modern equipment giving rise to errors and inaccuracies is almost more harmful than not using it at all.
Growing competition and the need to stay competitive as multinational retailing groups penetrate the Belgian market is the second source of impetus for the realization of this training programme.

Three year training programme for supermarket personnel

Groceries	C.C.V.P	Bread & Cakes	Fish	Prepacked dairy products	Fruit & Veg.	Cashiers	Administr.
V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	C	A
			Knowledge of firm Level 00				
			Internal Communication General Objectives				
			External Communication General Objectives				
	General sales objectives				Special Objectives	Special Objectives	
	General sales objectives						
	SO SO	SO SO	SO SO		SO	SO	

SO: Special objectives

2.4 Involvement of the social partners in training

Union representation is anchored in national legislation and collective agreements for the retail trade. Officials of the two unions (CNE and SETCA) have confirmed that the quota and union representation meet legal requirements.
The two main Belgian unions are represented in the firm, namely:

- the christian social grouping or CNE, the white-collar union to which 66% of firm X's staff belong, and
- the socialist union SETCA for white-collar workers and FGTB for blue-collar workers.

As there is no social worker in the company itself these two union representatives provide what they call a union service, particularly because there are many part-time workers and consequently a great many problems with paperwork to qualify for part-time unemployment benefit.
The staff council is composed of 13 members:

- Management: Mr Daniel X
- White-collar workers: 6 CNE representatives
- 4 SETCA representatives
- Blue-collar workers: 2 FGTB representatives.

Representatives on the safety and hygiene committee are similar to that of the staff council.
According to the management, relations between the social partners are good, honest and open; the union representatives describe them as direct and open. They add, however, that the direct dialogue is dying out because Mr. Daniel X is at present taking on a number of responsibilities outside the company itself. In his absence he is represented by the head of the personnel department, whose function it is to pass on messages from the top down and from the bottom up. While this person performs this task very well, he has no power of decision. Consequently there is a loss of time and of dialogue. The size of the company and its growth – the staff have doubled in 20 years – are undoubtedly a contributing factor here.
There is undoubtedly a misunderstanding between the social partners on how the expressions "to be involved in" and "to be informed of" are to be understood. According to the company management, union representatives were informed of the existence of the new training course for cashiers because their programme was submitted to the staff council of which these representatives are members. According to the staff representatives, however, they only heard of it by rumour before being officially informed through the staff council. They were not consulted either in its preparation or its organization. At the time of interviewing they had not received an invitation to take part in the first course or even in the test.
Without wishing to prejudge future developments, they are of the opinion that on the basis of specific experience to date it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for a cashier to benefit from internal promotion and reach, say, the level of department supervisor or manager.
They complain that training courses are too short and too rushed, that they do not allow enough time for staff to assimilate the material or simply to have hands-on experience of hardware. How, they ask, can a fresh produce sales assistant who has completed a rapid training course manage her department by computer when she has not even had any hands-on experience during the training course?
The union representatives are of the opinion that so far the company has taken neither the time nor used the means to train supermarket personnel. They also feel that there is a lack of instructors. In their view a specialist instructor for each type of department would not be a luxury. They also think that trainers should begin taking courses themselves in communication and psychology before taking up their task. An excellent sales assistant may turn out

to be a poor instructor lacking tact and any feeling for communication (N. B. This wish is about to be realized since a special course for instructors will be organized before the end of this year).

2.5 Description of principal training courses

The aims and principal methods used in the new training programme for supermarket personnel were described in Section 2.1 above.
This is a very wide-ranging and comprehensive training programme which does not neglect the communications and psychological aspects. Often these aspects are neglected and even omitted completely in training programmes, which is why their inclusion here is specifically mentioned.
This part of the programme is very important for two different reasons:

- It contributes to the understanding and even to the emergence of a corporate spirit and image;
- It is important to make staff aware of these aspects because of the low educational level of staff in certain jobs.

At present only one training course in the whole programme is operational, namely training concerning reception of customers and check-out, referred to above as the "cashiers" training course. The four other courses described below are older courses that are less comprehensive but give very good results. They will be included in the overall programme.

The new cashier training course

- *General objective:*
  To make cashiers aware of the importance of the way in which they speak to and treat customers and the different forms these techniques can take. To learn to deal intelligently with customers' complaints.
- *Specific objective:* To motivate cashiers and make them conscious of the value of their work.
- *Attendance:* Obligatory for all cashiers.
- *Methodology:* "Enrichment workshops" in groups of about 12.
- *Course duration:* 4 x 1/2 day.
- *Course content:*

Module 1: What the client sees and hears – theoretical aspects

Duration	:	1/2 day
Two subjects	:	Appearance = dress, make-up, smile etc.
Language	:	Conversation with customers
Method	:	Video presentation of simulated situations at the check-out
Trainer	:	Instructors

Module 2: What the client sees and hears – practical aspects

Duration	:	1/2 day
Content	:	Practical advice relating to module 1
Trainer	:	Specialized school for hostesses and beauty counsellors (course externally run)

Module 3: Is the customer king?

Duration	:	2 x 1/2 day
Content	:	Analysis of examples of contacts with customers
Methods	:	Role-playing
Trainer	:	Instructors

Comments of the person in charge of training
Because formal training courses are generally not popular and not understood by lower grade personnel, courses take the form of "Enrichment workshops".
The first reaction of certain members of staff was negative. This was the case of a union representative who tried to take advantage of his special status to avoid it. The management response was clear: The course is aimed at everyone, including union representatives, and anyone refusing to take part could no longer continue to function as a cashier.
Another negative reaction, based on rumours, from among the more experienced cashiers with between 10 and 20 years service was that they had nothing to learn from colleagues with less experience.

The "versatility" training course

Need: Whatever the problems caused by absence because of sickness or holiday, a physical presence is always necessary in a store to provide a service to customers, while keeping costs down because the room for manoeuvre is small:

Solution: Train a team of competent persons known as the "task force".

Methodology: A sandwich training course was decided on.

Selection criteria: Trainees were to be volunteers, motivated, competent and flexible from the point of view of schedules and travel. The young ONEM (Labour Exchange) trainees (Article 123 and Royal Decree 495) were eligible, whether or not already working for the company.
The course comprised three parts:

- Theoretical instruction from a vocational training school.
- Instruction on customer relations from FOREM.
- Practical work in supermarkets (15 members of the staff were designated to supervise trainees).

Advantages: Higher salary and possibility of time off in lieu.

Result: Very good, a 50% success rate.

The fresh produce training course

Needs:

- To train personnel in new supermarkets.

- To collaborate in launching new stores and ensure personnel follow-up.
- To train new managers of existing stores.
- To monitor and update departments in existing stores with management problems.

Objectives: This training has three well-defined and complementary objectives:
- To guarantee effective and economic management of the fresh produce departments so as to ensure that products on sale are as fresh as possible, to limit the need for mark-downs and to avoid wastage of perishable products.
- To comply with official regulations concerning the sale of fresh produce (standards on labelling, public health etc.).
- To attract customers and learn to react to their requirements. Studies have shown that nearly 75% of sales of fruit and vegetables are bought on impulse.

Departments involved:
- Fruit and vegetables
- Dairy products, cold meats, poultry, fish, bread and cakes, and frozen foods.

The butcher's department is quite different and is monitored by a team of inspectors and trainers.

Course: A complete theoretical and practical course for new recruits relating to specific techniques and management of the department, including the use of computers. The course is specially adapted for older personnel.

Duration: Usually from 3 to 6 months. 3 months is the absolute minimum and 6 months is often the maximum because new recruits are on probation for 6 months. In the case of fruit and vegetables the course should last 12 months to cover all the material completely because products here are seasonal.

Three-tier training:
- Training of existing and future department managers.
- Training of sales assistants.
- Training of stand-ins, i.e. sales assistants nominated to take charge of a department when the head of the department is off sick or on holiday.

Training is essentially directed to those who will in time be running a department, because they will have to be the moving spirit. It is also aimed at the sales assistants.

The head of department is responsible for selecting from among his sales assistants those most suitable and motivated to be trained as stand-ins. He makes the selection with the agreement of his superiors. Training is carried out by the head of department and if he does not have the time to do so he has to inform the person responsible for training who can then make suitable arrangements.

Methodology:
- Theory: once a week by the responsible trainer.
- Practice: the rest of the week under the supervision of an instructor.

Training team:
- The person responsible for the training course.
- Instructors for the fruit and vegetables department or for the other fresh produce departments.

Material and documentation:
- "The training booklet": This booklet contains key phrases which summarize the subject of dealing with fresh produce and which enable the instructors, the manager and also the trainee himself to ensure that he is performing his task correctly by using a method of self-assessment of skills already acquired.
- "Practical guide to fruit and vegetables": This guide takes the form of a folder containing an explanatory leaflet for each type of fruit and vegetable. This note sets out the quality standards for displaying the products under the following headings:
  Quality of the product for sale
  How to store it correctly
  Illustration (photo) of how to display it most attractively.

Assessment of trainees during the course:
Besides the "training booklet" controls, their superiors fill in an assessment form.
The first assessment takes place no later than 6 to 8 weeks after starting the course. Since the person concerned is informed of the various assessments throughout the course he is able to adjust and improve where necessary.

Result: Very satisfactory.

Comments by person responsible for the training course
- Training of personnel for new stores takes priority for two reasons:
  - New employees generally have no experience or technical skills.
  - The staff as yet lack a spirit of corporate culture.

Corporate culture is important because it is necessary for new employees rapidly to acquire a team spirit and perform their tasks well.

- Training of part-time employees takes twice as long as that for full-time employees, firstly because the part-timers are less available than their colleagues and secondly because they tend to be less motivated.

- The clear assessment carried out during the course enables a trainee to improve or to avoid an unpleasant surprise if his contract of employment has to be terminated.

The "potential store manager" training course

Need: The company's policy of expanding and opening new supermarkets creates a constant need for more personnel, particularly at the store manager level.

Solution: Internal promotion and in-house training of future managers.

Objectives: The manager should be able to manage each department of his supermarket in order to be able objectively to assess the needs, abilities and performance of each of his staff and to advise them where necessary. A manager should, moreover, have the qualities of a good manager and a competent knowledge of computers, and also be a leader so as to be able to create a team spirit in his supermarket.

Candidates: Mainly assistant store managers.

Duration: From 3 to 6 months depending on the trainees.

Programme: This course is tailor-made for each candidate taking account of his previous experience and is practice-oriented. It comprises periods of practical experience in the various departments in which the candidate has not yet worked, and also alongside a manager.
Since assistant managers generally have experience in the dry goods department, they have to spend 3 months in the fresh produce departments as necessary (for fresh produce training, see course 3 above).
Management training is carried out by a number of managers selected by senior management for their abilities and human qualities.

Assessment: At the end of the course the person responsible for the fresh produce training course and other trainers hold an assessment meeting with the candidate using a standard assessment form. The report is then submitted to the director of supermarkets.

Results: Very good, since future managers are trained in tailor-made courses and learn the working methods and management methods used in firm X.

The "wine counsellor" training course

Need: Belgian customers spend more time choosing and buying wine than other food products, particularly because they lack the necessary expertise. The staff responsible for the wine department wanted to be able to inform and advise uncertain customers.

Solution: Train a number of staff to be able to talk about the products they sell, without necessarily claiming to be great specialists.

Attendance: Store managers and their assistants.

Methodology: Lectures with wine tastings.

Duration: 13 sessions, every 3 weeks.

Course content: Using the five senses, the four flavours, aroma, appearance, bottles and glasses, anomalies, regions, vintages, what wine to drink with what food, how to advise customers, ciders, aperitifs, eau-de-vie and liqueurs.

Result: Very good, particularly because trainees are highly motivated.

The "sme management" training course

This course does not form part of firm X's overall training course. It is the result of the decision of 12 firms in the area to perform a social service.

General objective: To offer young people in the region the opportunity to acquire general training relating to management of a small or medium-sized enterprise and thus give them a greater chance of finding work. The young graduates should then serve as a useful basis for recruitment of future managers or heads of departments.

Solution: Train a group of young people in SME management by means of a tailor-made programme resulting from cooperation between the firms and the training centre.

Methodology: The sandwich course method was adopted with theoretical instruction at the training centre alternating with practical training in the firm. Training Centre: Select a school able to offer a good tailor-made course on SME management.

Duration: One school year broken down into 11 periods spent alternately at school or in the firm, making a total of 22 weeks in school and 18 weeks of practical training in the same firm.

Admission criterion: Candidates should hold at least a higher school leaving certificate. The group is limited to approximately 20 trainees.

Course content and objectives: At the end of the year-long training course the student should be able:
- to use the various functions of a computer, read data and check them for validity;
- to motivate his team, organize teamwork, resolve conflicts, hold meetings, hire and fire staff etc;
- apply accounting regulations, analyse and evaluate factors influencing sales (customers, competition etc.);
- have a practical command of Dutch and English sufficient for the day-to-day needs of the firm.

Result: The training course has not yet been completed, but the results seem good since very few people have left the course. While visiting a supermarket we met a trainee who was taking part in the course (see Section 3.3).

3. Specific analysis of a supermarket

3.1 General information

Location: in a new commercial centre 5 minutes from the centre of town with good parking facilities.
Size: 2000 sq. metres.

Since this is a very new supermarket it obviously meets the company's criteria, whether as regards the presentation of products on sale – which is very good, particularly in the case of fresh produce – or at the level of organization. In fact, following the general reorganization of sales outlets, two small units which were older and had no parking facilities

were closed down and replaced by the new supermarket, which is of optimum size and located in a more lively commercial environment.

3.2 Personnel

Since the supermarket is very new it is difficult to talk of staff growth except to say that there are already a number of additional employees. Three-quarters of the staff of the two stores that were shut down agreed to come to work at the new store.

The store employs 65 people:

- 14 full-time and 51 part-time (20 hours per week)
- 15 men and 50 women.

The 14 full-time employees (10 male/4 female) are mainly those occupying a post of responsibility – thus heads of department and those deputizing for the manager himself. The sales staff work part-time on the basis of a 20-hour week with variable working hours. As explained earlier, the manager is responsible for organizing the working hours of his staff.

The concern for profitability and computerization of a majority of jobs permits a strict control of costs and enables the firm at any moment to assess the situation of any department or the store as a whole. Staff output is calculated on an hourly basis.

Most of the staff are Belgian but there are a significant number of Italians. It is worth pointing out that between the two world wars this region experienced heavy Italian immigration. Many of these Italian families living in Belgium are already in the second or even the third generation. Some children have taken Belgian nationality. The store manager is himself of Italian origin.

The store has adopted the same opening hours as those of other stores in the shopping centre, thus from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Saturday. Holidays are governed by Belgian legislation and particularly by length of service, the total number of hours worked the previous year etc. This is generally a complex calculation.

The educational level is not any higher than for the staff as a whole. The great majority of staff did not undergo a recruitment prcedure since they were simply being transferred. The few new members of staff were recruited by the central personnel department.

When managing his personnel resources to bridge absences for reasons of illness or holiday or because of a heavy workload, a manager is able to call on members of the versatile task force.

3.3 Training programmes used

Obviously the various stores do not have their own training policy or structure, decisions in this sphere being made and implemented by the central management.

Since the company enforces a very strict cost control and all staff output is calculated on an hourly basis, it is difficult to organize courses for new members of staff. Heads of department do not really have the time to follow the training of new employees.

Training, in the sense of practical training, of new sales assistants generally lasts one month. On the first day a new recruit is informed of the workings and layout of the store and reads the documentation given to him. Practical training begins on the second day when he is taken in hand by the head of department. The fact that this is referred to as training indicates that his work is not included in the calculation of hourly output. On the other hand, no adjustment coefficient has been provided to permit the person responsible for training to devote himself to this task, for however short a time. Consequently, practical training may be well or less well monitored depending on the pressure of work within the department. When staff were questioned on this subject the most frequent reply was "How do you expect me to do this well if nobody has even shown me how to do it?".

The store also has "instructors" who may be called on to assist with the training of personnel, particularly in the case of fresh produce. These instructors report direct to head office. At the end of 1991 there were 4 such instructors, which is few bearing in mind the number of stores already in existence and the policy of steady growth (an average of 2 new stores a year, which implies the formation of 100 people a year). New cashiers are trained by a special instructor.

Three reports of people attending training courses

- While visiting a store one of the people conducting this study met a person forming part of the task force. She was delighted with the course because it now made her work seem more interesting and she was better paid. Although her work schedule was sometimes constricting, she could have time off in lieu for extra hours worked. Moreover she found the work less monotonous because she no longer always worked at the same place.

- The same person also interviewed a potential manager. He had begun work with firm as a storeman 16 years before and had then worked in the grocery department. The management wanted to give him the opportunity of promotion and suggested that he take this course in order to prepare himself to act first as an assistant manager with a view to becoming a manager later.
  Since he already knew the dry goods sector, his practical training programme put the accent on fresh produce, giving him a total of 3 months' training. At the time of interviewing the candidate was undergoing a second period of 4 weeks' practical training. He was finishing the third week and had learned everything about the operation of the fruit and vegetables department. The following week – the fourth – he would be made entirely responsible for this department (the head of department was going on holiday). Obviously should any problems arise he was at liberty to approach the manager. He was very pleased with the training being given, especially because it offered him a very good chance of promotion.

- Also during his visit the person conducting the study met a young man taking part in a sandwich training course for SME management. At the end of his secondary school studies he cast around for the right job for almost 4 years. The year before he had heard of the sandwich training programme preparing young people to become managers of SMEs and had decided to register. He had found

the return to school difficult at the beginning. Generally speaking the 19 students on the course - 3 of whom were being trained at store X - were satisfied with the programme although some were disappointed with the practical training given. There was a very wide gap between the sometimes exaggerated expectations of trainees and reality where practical training was sometimes very restricted. This discrepancy caused three young people to leave the course. Our trainee also stressed that the quality of practical experience largely depended on the open-mindedness of the person responsible for the practical training and his ability to motivate his subordinates. He quoted the case of another colleague on the course who was doing his practical course in another firm X supermarket. This young man had had difficulties with his practical work because the manager "did not believe" in the programme.

4. Assessment

Assessment by the company

Hitherto the company had not had a formal training policy for its staff forming part of the company's overall strategy. Training was given on a case by case basis. Despite the difficulty of finding people with the necessary qualifications staff training tended to be neglected.

This caused senior management to completely revise its approach to the problem. It first set up its own training unit within the personnel department and then decided to carry out training itself within the firm, though without ruling out the possibility of utilizing the services of external trainers from time to time when special skills were needed. Finally it drew up a systematic global training programme.

Because the firm's strategy places particular stress on friendly service, staff become a key element since it is they who are in contact with customers.

Another key element of this strategy which does not appear in any specific training programme is dialogue. To put it more specifically: the hierarchy had to be taught to enter into a dialogue. This training is crucial at human level since in the long term it will modify the behaviour and function of the heads of department and of the manager.

This is a difficult task. If we take the example of a person who has just been made manager on the basis of an internal promotion and is now at the head of the career pyramid, this person will be asked to enter into dialogue, to motivate, to encourage, whereas in order to get where he is he had to distance himself and not enter into dialogue. A person cannot be expected radically to change his behaviour on the basis of a seminar lasting only a few days. It was, therefore, necessary to plan a continuous programme of internal training. The method used is that of example and for credibility the example must come from above, hence from the management, and from colleagues. This is the best way of proving that dialogue is possible and can be effective.

Assessment by staff and staff representatives

The general attitude was one of "wait and see". Waiting and hoping are a priori positive for a number of reasons:

- Training is part of a genuine policy.
- It is pragmatic.
- It will permit internal promotions.

Union representatives would like at least to be consulted about certain courses and not simply be vaguely informed. They would also like communication to be more direct, clearer and prompter.

Assessment by the author

The importance of staff training within this family firm cannot be dissociated from the way in which the firm is expanding in stages on the basis of precise strategic decisions.

The management was initially (1930-1955) only concerned with growth, extending its network of concessionaires and branches. Then came the phase of modernization of sales techniques (1957 - 1978), the introduction of self-service and the replacement of small branches by supermarkets. The third phase involved the introduction of new technology (up to 1990) such as computerized management, check-outs with optical scanning permitting rationalization of stock management and cost control. The fourth phase has just begun, namely the planning of marketing linked to the policy of territorial expansion. It is in this last phase that staff training will find its real justification.

Previous experiments with staff training had been isolated attempts, often too much directed to social and economic matters instead of to management. The only training made compulsory over the years was training in the handling of fresh produce. Although other experiments were not successful they were nonetheless experiments which enabled the senior management and personnel department to draw very useful conclusions when developing its new staff training strategy.

The present size of the company allows it to have a training unit. It is vital to have training under control without however wanting to do everything oneself. Using the services of outside specialists has its advantages in terms of the psychological impact on staff and because it avoids the trap of too rapidly employing a great number of people for the training unit to cope with a peak workload which is only transitory. The next, crucial step will be not merely to organize follow-up in terms of continuous training but also to reorganize initial training given to new recruits.

Finally, mention must be made of the importance of communication and information within a firm. When the firm was smaller and its organization less complex, the staff knew one another and talked to one another without difficulty. Now this is no longer the case - part of the price of success!

In a field such as staff training where psychology and motivation play such an important part, it is necessary to avoid misunderstandings by taking the initiative with clear and accurate information. This makes it possible to control the damage done by rumour. It is of prime importance particularly if one wishes to emphasize the virtues of dialogue, that management should set an example.

5. Transferability

This case study has shown up a number of elements which could be useful to other firms.

- *Methodology:*
  Short courses should be preferred to formal courses;
  Practical training is as important as theoretical training;
  Allow enough time for each participant to practise once or twice.

- *Psychology:*
  When training is set up for a large group of people with different experience and different educational levels, the training should be organized in modules to avoid everyone being lumped together with the risk of certain people becoming demotivated.

- *Motivation:*
  Where a training programme is optional the essential criterion for selection is motivation;
  It is important to specify to staff the objectives and advantages of any kind of training course.

- *Duration:*
  The training session should not be too long. Where a course is long it should be broken down into stages, with each stage complete in itself.

- *Strategy:*
  It is important to inform staff and communicate with them especially when large-scale training is embarked upon. It is important to explain its importance not only for each person individually but also for the life and development of the firm itself.

LOUIS DELHAIZE GROUP

UNIVERSITE DE LIEGE
Centre de Recherche &
de Documentation PME

Liège, 20 May, 1992

1. General description of the group

1.1 Brief description

Formed	: 125 years ago
Legal status	: Société anonyme (company limited by shares)
Equity held by	: Family
Capital	: ECU (Bfrs) in December 1991
Business	: Retailing
Six chains in Belgium	: • 147 Profi discount stores (food) • 45 Match supermarkets • 12 Louis Delhaize delicatessen stores • 6 Cora hypermarkets • 4 Bricoman diy stores • 6 Le Chesnoy restaurants
Type of products	: Varies from one chain to another
Personnel	: 8,800 (estimate for 1992)
Sales	: ECU 1.7 billion (= Bfrs 70 billion) – estimate for 1992

1.2 History of the group

The present shareholders of the Louis Delhaize group have the same family roots as the shareholders of the other group in the distribution sector with the same family name. At the end of the last century, two brothers, coming from a large family, started in business: the first one settled in the Brussels area while the other remained in his area of origin. Two different branches were created in this way, because of the geographical distance, which in those days was important.

The founder of the family branch discussed here kept one son with him in order to ensure his succession, while he sent his two other sons to settle in the North of France where they also started a business. The present managers of the group are the fourth generation of the French branch who came back to work in Belgium.

The financial group set up under Belgian law was created twenty years ago and decided to invest in the large-scale retail sector. At the beginning, it mainly invested in food discount stores. Later it took over other existing groups or chains of stores. In most cases it had to revitalize them with a new structure, a new business plan and new investments. Seven years ago the firm grouped together two hypermarket chains to form the present chain. Then, five years ago, it took over a chain of discount stores in the north of the country which took the same name as the other discount stores.

The composition of the group changed with the various takeovers, mergers and changes of company names. It now has six main chains of stores in Belgium. The group also has discount stores in Luxembourg. Moreover, there are in Belgium 450 independent stores trading under different names, 300 in Luxembourg and 300 in Spain.

Each chain has of course its own strategy. However, three strategic elements are common to all the chains of the group: expansion, price competitiveness and service to the customer.

The managers of the group consider they have a duty to ensure the continuity of the family company. Their priority is to maintain shareholder stability so as to ensure stability and financial security for all the senior managers of the six chains of the group. This explains the deliberate policy of non-payment of dividends : the payout amounts only to 3%, while 97% of cash flow is ploughed back into the group.

1.3 Structure of the group

The style of management is defined by the group's Chairman, Mr. Pierre Delhaize, as a "light cavalry": very little central administration and the single motto: "decentralization". The general management of the group and general management of each chain must coordinate but not centralize; it must think globally but act locally.

The main characteristic of the Louis Delhaize group as far as structure and management are concerned is decentralization. Not only is each chain managed quite independently from the other five but within each chain each store is independent. Even better, each department within a store is decentralized. This decentralization does not mean that stores in a same chain do not have a similar structure and mode of operation.

Each chain operates on the basis of a flexible structure which is not that of the classical pyramid. This flexibility is reflected in very short decision-making channels which are generally restricted to two levels. In the case of the Cora hypermarkets the overall structure has only five levels: the general management and four levels in each hypermarket. In the case of the Bricoman diy stores there are four levels – the general management and three levels in each store.

The smallest unit working autonomously is the department. This operates like a mini-firm with an average sales floor of 200 sq. metres, a staff of between 5 and 10 and sales of the order of Bfrs 100 to 300 million, depending on the sales area and type of department. The head of department functions like the manager of a small business, with his own decentralized accounts. He orders goods from a list drawn up by head office, and is responsible for taking delivery. He fixes the profit margins and selling prices, except in the case of goods on special offer throughout the chain. He is responsible for the good functioning and organization of his department and for the hours worked by his staff, as also for sales and profits. In other words he is reponsible for everything in his department except personnel – job descriptions and hiring and firing which require the agreement of his superior, in this case the store manager.

This decentralization and freedom of action are only really effective and profitable when they accord with the global life and development of each store and more generally if they make for synergy helping to reach the company's targets. Strictly individualistic behaviour is not accepted either by the management or by a managers' peers.

A second characteristic of the group is that there is no head of personnel either at group level or for a given chain or even for a decentralized store. This peculiarity originated in the social climate prevailing in the retail sector 20 years ago. Because he felt that retailing was first and foremost a service and wanted to create a social climate favouring this concept the chairman of the group did away with the post of head of personnel. He did so for three reasons:

- To avoid the head of personnel being squeezed between the various local managements and the unions and thus an unhealthy situation which could too easily lead to confrontations or misunderstandings between the social partners;

- To give more responsibility to store managers. In the case of conflict in order to avoid trouble or sometimes because of a lack of social ability, managers tended to hold aloof from the head of personnel; this behaviour merely helped to poison the working atmosphere.

- The position and role of personnel manager were too fixed and sometimes stereotyped, whereas a firm is a unit which is continuously evolving.

Although the post of head of personnel no longer exists, the function itself does. However, it has been broken up between the general managers of the various chains and store managers. In fact, a store manager nowadays is not only a decision-maker and responsible for performance, but is also the personnel manager. This decentralization of the personnel function makes it possible to sort out local problems on the spot with complete involvement of the senior staff concerned and also to react more rapidly to the evolving needs of each store.
This breaking down of the personnel management function does not mean that there is not a real policy for management of human resources and a policy for staff training. Training has become a key element for internal promotion. The group chairman attaches great importance to his human resources and to the confidence that should exist in relations between the social partners.
A third characteristic of the Louis Delhaize group is the confidence placed in persons in charge at any level. This confidence is in harmony with the highly decentralized form of organization. Since the management has entrusted them with management of a mini-firm, the delegation of powers must be merited at all times, not only in terms of technical competence and economic and financial results but also through a transparent, honest form of management in order to keep intact the capital of confidence entrusted to them. Any breach of this rule is severely sanctioned because confidence is the basis of the management style chosen by the group management.
Group management considers that it is the choice of people that makes the difference. A person occupying a post of responsibilty within the Louis Delhaize group needs to be an "achiever". To give him a full sense of responsibility the form of management chosen is the "global approach" with no division of functions. This makes for greater motivation, an absence of bureaucracy and encourages autonomy in action.

1.4 Size and location

The Louis Delhaize group is one of Belgian's major retail firms. The four food multiples have an almost 10% share of the Belgian market. The group occupies 25th place in the top 100 consolidated companies (taken from the "Top 30 000" – the largest firms in Belgium graded on the basis of 1990 sales Trends-Tendance, Brussels, March 1992).
Three chains rank among the 20 leading retail companies in Belgium ("Top 30 000" for 1992) and if their sales were aggregated they would hold third place.
Although its principal market is Belgium, the group also has a presence in Luxembourg (discount stores, supermarkets and restaurants), in Spain (supermarkets), in France (discount stores), and Hungary (discount stores).

1.5 Personnel

At the end of 1992 the Louis Delhaize group will have 8,800 employees – almost 2,000 of whom abroad, especially in Luxembourg and Spain compared with a figure of 7,700 in 1990.

1.6 Comments

Because the Louis Delhaize group is completely decentralized, we thought it would be interesting to study two very different chains in terms of size and type of product sold, namely the Cora hypermarkets and the Bricoman diy stores. However, they do share the three characteristics of the group – decentralization, absence of personnel manager and emphasis on the confidence factor.
Since they are completely independent the two chains will be looked at as if they were different companies. The presentation of the two studies will be based on the outline proposed while placing the emphasis on the specific features of training proper to each chain. On the other hand, less attention will be given to other points in the outline so as not to make the case study too heavy.

Case study A: The Cora hypermarkets

1. General description of the company

1.1 Outline in brief

Joined the Louis Delhaize group in 1980
Legal status: Société anonyme (company with liability limited by shares)
Equity held by: Louis Delhaize family capital: ECU 55.5 million (Bfrs 2.2 billion) on 31 December 1991
Type of business: Hypermarket retailing
Type of products: Food, textiles, hi-fi, seasonal items
Location: 5 stores in the southern part of the country, and 1 in Brussels
Staff: 2,310 on 31 December 1991
Sales: ECU 655 million (Bfrs 26.2 billion) on 31 December 1991

1.2 History of the company and recent strategy developments

In 1969, a French group established itself in Belgium and opened up the first Belgian hypermarket. Further hypermarkets were opened at the beginning of the seventies but these were sold a few years later to another company. At the same time another group opened two hypermarkets in Belgium.
In 1980 the Louis Delhaize group took over both networks and combined them into the Cora hypermarket chain. The various changes of ownership and company style had generated a climate of uncertainty and strain among the staff.

Decentralization down to department level had existed since the first hypermarkets were opened by the French group. Since the accent had been placed on productivity and profitability, heads of department had been employed and tested mainly for their fighting temperament. The considerable freedom allowed each head of department, which included choosing his own suppliers, led to certain deviations in behaviour which had a harmful effect on the morale and attitude of lower-grade staff.
The new Cora management has kept the principle of decentralization except as regards choice of suppliers. For this it has created a central department for seeking out suppliers and types of products to be included in the range of products marketed. It is within this range that heads of department now choose the products they wish to sell. The new management is also responsible for two other characteristics of the Louis Delhaize group, namely the absence of a head of personnel and the importance of the confidence factor.

1.3 Structure of the company

Decentralization is the main feature of the company's structure and management. Not only is each store manager independent of the other five but the various departments within each store are managed in a decentralized manner. This decentralization does not mean that stores within the same chain do not have a similar structure and mode of operation.

Each department operates autonomously like a mini-firm with a sales floor of between 200 and 300 sq. metres, a staff of between 5 and 10 (full-time equivalent) and an average sales figure of between Bfrs 100 and 300 million, depending on type of department. Since the head of department works on his own account he operates like the manager of a small or medium-sized enterprise. He draws up and places orders with suppliers listed by the three people at head office responsible for selection and takes delivery of goods. He fixes prices and profit margins, except on articles on special promotion throughout the chain. He is responsible for the good organization of his department and the work schedules of his personnel, as also for sales and profits in his department. In fact the head of department is responsible for everything in his department except personnel: job descriptions and hiring and firing require the agreement of his immediate superior, the store manager.

The Cora chain of hypermarkets only has five hierarchical levels – general management and four levels within each store. It operates with a flexible structure reflected in very short decision-making channels restricted to two levels. At each level of responsibility the manager or managers are assisted by an accountant because they have decentralized bookkeeping.

Level 1: General management of the chain
Level 2: Management of a hypermarket
Level 3: Sales managers
Level 4: Heads of departments (approximately 40)
Level 5: Sales staff

Whatever the level, each person with responsibilities has both operational and functional responsibilities. Thus each hypermarket manager is not only responsible for everything concerning his store but is also functional director of a sales sector for all the five other hypermarkets within the chain.

1.4 Size and location

The Cora chain has 6 hypermarkets in Belgium, 5 in Wallonia and 1 in Brussels. Each Cora store has 40 departments and a sales floor of 12,000 sq. metres. Whereas conventional supermarkets are in general seen in Belgium as neighbourhood stores, the Cora hypermarkets are located in large areas on the town's periphery.

1.5 Personnel

On December 31, 1991 the Cora chain employed 2,848 persons, approximately 40% of whom were working part-time. In full-time equivalent terms the number of staff is 2,310.

a. Staff growth

Year	Number of physical persons	Number of persons full-time equivalent
1985	2,248	1,677
1986	2,336	1,792
1987	2,583	2,010
1988	2,931	2,317
1989	2,865	2,272
1990	2,867	2,323
1991	2,848	2,310

b. Staff breakdown

By gender		Working hours	
Men	1,050	Full-time:	1,481
Women	1,798	Part-time[1]:	1,367

By gender and working hours

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Men	899	151	1,050
Women	582	1,216	1,798
Total	1,481	1,367	2,848

[1] "Part-time" means an average working time of 22 to 24 hours per week, equivalent to 2/3 of a full-time working week.

1.6 Working conditions

Each store has its own agreements negotiated with the local unions. Thus each store manager is directly responsible for undertakings vis-à-vis the staff and its representatives. He has, of course, the power to take decisions in negotiations with the unions and is therefore the person with whom the staff discusses. Job descriptions prepared for recruitment and the general organization of departments were also used to classify the different types of work. These classifications apply throughout the Cora chain. The wage scales applied to these various categories are negotiated store by store with local union representatives and the local manager.

1.7 Recruitment

As in many other retail stores Cora recruits the major portion of its personnel from among what are known as the "risk groups" in the population. Heads of department and other managers generally have a university or equivalent qualification and are "achiever" types. In the past the accent was solely on the fighting aspect of a candidate's personality but this recruitment policy, together with a lack of internal consistency and management control, resulted in somewhat extreme behaviour on the part of a number of heads of department (some of the people interviewed did not hesitate to qualify them as bullies or even worse).

If in the past recruitment was conducted almost exclusively via the union representatives, for several years now it has been based on objective criteria in the form of tests. These tests have a two-fold objective:

a. to assess the technical abilities of candidates on the basis of the minimum qualifications needed for the post, and

b. to assess the ability of candidates to work with others in a team.

Any decision to recruit a person or to promote someone is always based on the agreement between two people: The direct superior and his hierarchical superior. The probation period for cashiers is one month to a year for heads of department.

At present about half the line managers have achieved their position through internal promotion while the other half were recruited directly. Even if the majority of line managers hold a higher education qualification (university degree or equivalent) heads of department are first and foremost people trained on the job. Since line managers are not very numerous and since the productivity of the staff at large is rather low, the head of department has to make up for this by putting in a greater effort. He is, as the manager of the firm of consultants, coordinating the Cora training programme put it, both the head and legs of his department.

The managing director of Cora is convinced that a good job description is a real investment, even if it calls for many hours of thought and negotiation before being put into effect. Ultimately this description will minimize recruiting errors, avoid subjective or arbitrary decisions and improve the social climate.

Each Cora employee has his own personal file in which are recorded the annual development interviews – the term "development" has a more positive connotation than the term "assessment" – as also any training courses which the person concerned has attended.

2. Training policy

2.1 Training policy: history and current situation

There is little point here in going back over past errors in the sphere of personnel management. Similar errors were made in the training courses which did not really match the real requirements and motivation of the staff involved. While the content of courses were certainly useful in itself, the method of formal theoretical courses employed was not suitable for the type of trainees and results were consequently mediocre.

The new Cora management attributes great importance to human capital and from the outset began to study and review the general policy of personnel management. One result of this was the production of a documentary guide to human resources with the following contents:

Job description for each post, wages paid according to the type of job performed, introduction of development interviews – involving an assessment of performance based on three criteria, commercial ability, interpersonal skills and ability to identify with the firm and its objectives. This guide is the bible as far as personnel management is concerned; it is not regarded as the final word, but something that will evolve with the company.

From the very beginning the new management commissioned a study of the company's image among the staff, which enabled it to better understand employees' behaviour and their aspirations. A second study was carried out 2 years ago and will endeavour to measure any changes in the attitude of staff. This revealed a good spirit and strong loyalty to the Cora company. The present policy of staff training has a three-fold objective:

- To enable employees to understand the operation and the economics of a retail firm
- To help staff to master their job and their responsibilities,
- To encourage the acquisition of interpersonal skills.

It is hoped that the synergy generated by these three objectives will contribute to the success of the overall company programme referred to as "the Cora project".

The training programme as a whole has been designed and implemented in collaboration with an external firm and breaks down into three main sections:

- The so-called "Cora School" which seeks to train staff in the economics of the firm. This comprises 7 optional courses.
- Technical training made up of: sales training (2 options), product training (3 options), wine training (7 options) and computer training (8 options).
- General management training: the principles of management (3 options) and the practice of management (2 options).

2.2 Training structure: history and current situation

There is no training department either at group level or individual hypermarket level. However, there is a very highly developed training structure received and implemented by the general management of the Cora company and hypermarket managers in collaboration with a specialist external firm concerned with management of human resources and communication.
In addition to the designing and implementation of the principal training courses (the firm itself does not do everything) as well as the coordination of related training courses, this outside firm has also actively contributed to the design and implementation of the corporate project. It is within this framework that it is involved in staff recruitment, produces company newspapers and even produces video films for special occasions. Moreover, when it does not itself run the training courses it trains the trainers who do so.
This firm was already working with one of the hypermarket networks before the new management came on the scene and cooperation since then has been intensified. According to the manager of the firm of consultants, Cora's managing director is very concerned about the firm's social role and particularly the quality and accessibility of training courses for the staff as a whole.

2.3 Impact of new technology on training

Part of the training programme relates to the introduction of computerized management. It is a preparatory training programme, with the possibility of refresher courses, that takes place before the general introduction of computerized management.
Considerable use is made of audio visual teaching aids for the organization, presentation or introduction of course subject matter. However, these are not regarded as of prime importance; the principal teaching method is student participation.

2.4 Involvement of the social partners in training

The social partners are not directly involved in designing training programmes. They are informed of the preparation and existence of new courses via the staff council and the safety and hygiene committee.
It is worth pointing out here that decentralization also reflects at this level. Since each hypermarket is independent, each has its own staff council and its own safety and hygiene committee,as well as its own union representatives. The opinion of the social partners is asked for when a study is made of one specific hypermarket.

2.5 Description of principal training courses

Every year the general management publishes and circulates among staff a brochure setting out the programme of training courses available (Annex 1). This brochure specifies:the objective of each course, its content, techniques used, the target groups for different types of technical training and details of organization (location of course and time required). This comes accompanied with a registration form (Annex 2) which enables staff to choose the courses in which they are interested. The completed registration forms are used to prepare a yearly training plan for each individual employee, which is then placed in his or her personal file.
There are three types of training course available:
a. Technical training.
b. General management training.
c. Specific company training (the Cora School).

Technical training for a specific job is compulsory: All other training courses are optional but considered desirable.

Training always takes place in working hours and is organized either outside the firm or in the special training room available in each hypermarket. All training classes are organized for small groups on the basis of student participation.

a. Technical training (compulsory)

This heading covers all kinds of training connected with selling and products. It is compulsory and must be completed within 2 years of recruitment.
Technical training comprises three types of course:

- Sales training
  Contact with customers: an audio cassette containing 40 exercises is given to each trainee
  Sales: 1 day, video role-playing, exercises, short lecture.
- Product training
  Textile products: 2 days, brief lectures, and case studies of specific products
  B8 products: 1 day per family of products, use and role-playing
  Fresh produce: on-site training with video material, brochures, and loose-leaf notes (see below for further details)
  wine: 6 days, 7 modules, game, lecture and wine tasting.
- Computer training: 8 modules, 14 days, lecture and hands-on experience.

The theoretical part of the fresh p oduce training course, which is organized using video films, is complemented by illustrated technical brochures and leaflets. These leaflets summarize the main points

covered in training. They are sheathed in plastic in the interest of hygiene and for ease of use in the department (Annexes 3 and 4). These documents are very useful to put the finishing touch to training and help students to recall its content. Each hypermarket manager has a complete set of teaching equipment for each module and is thus able to supervise the organization of training courses in the store itself.

Wine training is very important because the Cora chain aims to position itself among the large stores offering the best selection of wines and beers on the market and with the most knowledgeable staff. This training programme is made up of 7 modules involving 6 days training. Each module ends with a practical wine tasting session. The theory of the geographical and wine growing regions of France and the various types of wines grown there are taught using a "Tour de France" game. This begins with a blank map of France. As the game progresses the players have to answer questions concerning the history and geography of the region being discussed, locate towns and vineyards and, of course, buy wine in each region they pass through.

Computer training is similarly very important. This is given before the generalized introduction of management software courses. Its purpose is to give staff an initial acquaintance with hardware and software. It also includes refresher sessions for those people unable to put the knowledge acquired into practice immediately.

b. General management training

This began almost five years ago. About 250 people attended such training courses during the first three years. The course is evolving because it is added to as specific needs emerge. It is less in demand at the moment because most managerial staff have already attended such a course. It would seem to be of little interest to lower grade personnel because demand is very sluggish. The programme is made up as follows:

- Principles of management
  Management by objective: 1 day, lectures, audio-visual aids, case studies, role-playing
  Giving praise: 1 day, lectures, self-diagnosis, role-playing
  Giving reprimands: 1 day, lectures, role-playing

- Management practice
  Conducting a meeting: 1 day, analysis, role-playing, assessment of meeting, lecture
  Development interview: 1 day, lecture, role-playing, audio visual aids

c. Specific company training (the Cora School)

The training in the running of a firm is very recent. In the course of the other training programmes it was found that staff generally, including department heads, were lacking in training in commercial retailing and knew very little about the operation of a retail firm.
In order to plug this gap, the company introduced this wide ranging training programme and new material has been added over the years. Its objective is to instruct new employees, heads of department and would-be heads of department in the basic procedures and techniques of the retail trade as reflected in the Cora hypermarkets.

The programme currently comprises seven modules:

- Module 1: A game simulating the operations of a retail firm;
- Module 2: Presentation of the general policy of the Cora chain;
- Module 3: How to structure the range of products in a department;
- Module 4: Principles of shelf location;
- Module 5: Ordering, stock managment, inventories;
- Module 6: Selling price, 20/80 earnings margin;
- Module 7: Profit margin and unknown markdowns.

Module 2 enables trainees to place themselves in the context of the Cora chain and of the Louis Delhaize group, as well as in the environment of major retailing generally.
Module 1 is the latest training course which was first launched in 1991. It took two years to develop. This is a game on the lines of Monopoly.

First Objective: To explain the economics of a retail firm and the impact of the macro-and mini-environments on this process.

Second Objective: To show the difference between turnover and profit by building a profit and loss account and a balance sheet at the end of each half day.

Attendance: Heads of sector and heads of department have priority, subsequently staff as a whole, including cashiers.

Teaching method: "Monopoly" game to pass on information and subsequently explain it.

Number of participants per group: Generally 9, broken down into 3 teams of 3 people.

Duration: Two days (two to three weeks apart), broken down into four half-days.

Structure and subject matter:
- 1st half-day: management of a corner shop selling one or two items of food
- 2nd half-day: management of a small self-service shop selling six types of food products
- 3rd half-day: managing a supermarket selling food and other products
- 4th half-day: management of a hypermarket selling all types of products.

If participants are very good and think quickly they can in one and the same session play a second game similar to the first but more complicated. Thus during the first session the second game will relate to four products. At the end of each game players draw up a financial balance of their commercial

activity and analyze the results obtained. At the end of two days they will thus have drawn up at least four balance sheets and analyzed four profit and loss accounts.

This game enables players to penetrate the complex mechanisms governing economic activity and their financial impact on the firm in which they work without any theoretical instruction. Participants learn by playing. At the end of the course the trainer summarizes the knowledge acquired but only on the basis of what the students in each group have understood. The level of explanations here will thus vary according to the group's composition. The strength of this game is that knowledge is obtained by induction and is adapted to the ability of players to absorb knowledge.

Trainees enjoy this course and tell their colleagues so, and thanks to word of mouth propaganda the course is in great demand. The company's aim is that all staff, including cashiers, should attend this course.

3. Analysis of one particular hypermarket

3.1 General information

Location: A large shopping centre with parking facilities on the periphery of a large town in the south-west of Belgium. The whole shopping centre is incidently known as the "Cora shopping centre". There is parking space for 2,200 cars.
Sales floor: 12,000 sq. metres

This store is the oldest in the Cora chain and the largest as far as staff numbers goes. It is also the store that has witnessed the most sudden and most serious industrial disputes – due no doubt in part to the social and economic situation in the region as a whole. Sales in 1991 were approximately ECU 150 million (Bfrs 6 billion).

3.2 Personnel

On 31 December 1991 the store had 646 employees, about 47% of which were working part-time. Converted into full-time equivalent figures the total number of staff is 511.

Of the 646 people employed, 10 are part of the management staff (including the store manager), 40 are executives (i.e. heads of department) and the approximately 600 other people are the lower-grade staff, 200 of which are cashiers (only 8 of them on full-time). Even though the majority of the staff is of Belgian nationality, people of various nationalities work in the store. According to the union representatives no fewer than 27 nationalities are represented. Staff turnover is low.

a. Staff growth

Year	Number of physical persons	Number of persons full-time equivalent
1985	448	426
1986	506	423
1987	592	504
1988	623	520
1989	651	524
1990	632	520
1991	646	511

b. Staff breakdown

By gender		Working hours	
Men	233	Full-time:	431
Women	413	Part-time[1]:	305

By gender and working hours

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Men	195	38	233
Women	146	267	413
Total:	341	305	646

[1] "Part-time" means an average of 22 to 24 hours per week, i.e. 2/3 of a full-time working week.

3.3 Training programmes used

The new management has developed staff training programmes considerably but it respects the freedom of choice of the staff since courses are optional, except for the specific job training which is compulsory.
The aim of staff training courses is two-fold, namely to allow everyone to master the techniques of his job and his responsibilities and at the same time to manage well.
Each employee has his own personal file containing records of yearly assessment interviews and the record of training courses attended. This is vital in order to monitor the progress of a person's career within the firm seriously and objectively.
The staff of this store, and those of the five other stores, each year receive a programme of training courses available, together with a registration form on which to register for the courses they would like to attend. The management uses these registration forms to plan the training courses for each person and the form and plan are then placed in the personal file.
How many different courses a person attends varies essentially with the position of the person concerned. Executives are far more interested in training than low-grade personnel. Cashiers are those showing the least interest. This is perhaps due to the fact that most of them work part-time and are thus less available – and possibly less motivated – to spend a whole day being trained.

However everyone is obliged to take part in specific job training which must be completed within two years of recruitment. This always takes place during working hours and is generally held in a special room in the hypermarket. The managers of each hypermarket have a complete set of video, audio and brochure material enabling them to organize courses easily and rapidly. Training is on the basis of participation and is conducted by a trainer from the external firm of consultants with the assistance of a member of the hypermarket staff or by an internal instructor trained for this purpose by the consultant. Training on "contact with customers" is aimed particularly at cashiers. It takes two full days. Now this course is well accepted. However, the manager pointed out that less than five years ago the trade unions were still opposed to training for cashiers. When interviewed the manager said that in his view the work of a cashier is the most difficult and the most stressful because it is the customer who dictates the rhythm of working at the check-outs. Even if experience has enabled the firm to identify peak periods – whether days or hours in a week or in a season – and even if the staff's work is organized to allow for these peak periods, it is still impossible to control times when customers use the store. At peak periods all 40 check-outs are in use and the cashier's pace of working is more than ever dictated by customers.

Since each head of department is regarded as the head of an SME and works on this basis with considerable freedom of action and a sales figure of between Bfrs 100 and 300 million a year, he must be given adequate support in the form of a sound corporate project. This project summarizes the objectives and overall policy of the firm. The collective plan has been drawn up to assist each employee to perform well in his individual job; emulation and personal results must be included in the global performance and be in the general interest.

The concept of collective interest is very important in the eyes of the management, who would very much like this concept to become the central element of its corporate culture. It is set out in its corporate project. It is, therefore, all the more necessary to bear in mind that in the very recent past individualism was the rule, particularly among heads of department, as a result of which lower grade staff became bitter and disillusioned. Here training is not sufficient and the example of management is required. This is why everyone who transgresses this rule is immediately reprimanded or even dismissed.

As yet very few heads of department have had the chance to attend the latest module in the Cora School training courses, namely the management game. The executives of two other stores have already begun the course and this year it will be the turn of the store under study. The manager hopes that the well-earned reputation will encourage a large number of people to register, including cashiers.

3.4 Involvement of the social partners in training

It should be recalled at this point that because of decentralization each hypermarket has its own union representatives on the staff council and safety and hygiene committee. This permits a far more direct dialogue between employer and employees.

For the time being a certain mistrust continues to exist in relations between management and personnel due to the conflicts and unfortunate events of the past. According to union representatives, the climate is now improving but people find it difficult to forget the past. The person interviewed thought it was important to remember the past in order to understand the present. When the hypermarket was first opened management was completely decentralized because heads of department were also responsible for finding their own suppliers and were generally all-powerful as far as lower grade staff were concerned. Heads of department were recruited by testing candidates. After a brief interview candidates were tested in the following situation: "As from today you are the head of a small company; sort things out for yourself". The only criterion applied was profitability. The test was regarded by candidates as a trial of strength which only the most perseverant or strongest survived. Add to this the many temptations such as bribes, interplay of influences, blackmail and the like to which certain department heads succumbed. The result was a kind of executive culture – "We are the most beautiful and the strongest" – so that a strained and even violent working climate developed.

Everything therefore combined to create an explosive climate and most strikes were not designed to obtain increases in wages but to demand that the workers' dignity be respected.

The new management was unable to change this situation overnight. The first thing it did was to restrict the freedom of action of heads of department by putting the accent on confidence and the responsibility of each one. At the same time it changed the method of recruitment using job descriptions and objective testing, as well as the criteria of selection applied (ability, human qualities, leadership rather than aggressiveness, and so on). The staff still includes some of the old department heads. Although their influence on new colleagues was important in the beginning, it diminished as time went on. The new school is itself creating its own culture with the accent on competence, confidence, leadership and more civilized behaviour.

Dialogue – and on occasion confrontation – between management and staff representatives has mainly been concerned with the need to respect the dignity of workers. The management has understood the importance of this and, given the behaviour of some department heads, is now responsible for showing respect to its lower grade staff. During a fairly recent conflict this position of the management led to a head of department being dismissed. Union representatives have not collaborated directly in designing training courses. On the contrary, during meetings of the staff council they have on numerous occasions stressed the importance of the human factor in relationships between workers and management. They have also greatly influenced the choice of subject matter for training courses. Moreover, they have also requested new recruitment procedures so as to limit the authority of a number of department heads in this area. Currently recruitment is carried out on a correct and objective basis.

4. Assessment

Assessment by the firm

In a very competitive market the Cora management considers that it is the professional approach and the interpersonal skills of staff that will gain customer loyality and enable them to cope with competition. This was the consideration that led to the creation of a staff training programme. At the same time, training is also an essential means of helping staff to identify with the company and to help resolve sudden conflict situations. The communication course and the new personnel policy had the same aims. By putting the accent on the team and the company rather than on the individual and by overhauling the recruitment system, restructuring working procedures and training its staff, the management aimed to make each employee aware of his responsibilities, particularly heads of department. Each of the latter has considerable freedom of action based on confidence, enabling him to act as a real manager.

This freedom can only be used in the context of the whole and on behalf of the whole. At no time should individual performance and a spirit of competition prevail over the general interests of the company. The management considers that the corporate project goes a long way to help each employee master all the aspects of his job and consequently attain his own personal career objectives. Priority is given to people rather than to systems.

The various training programmes and particularly the latest – the management game – seek to achieve these objectives. Although at the beginning the management did not enjoy the support of the unions as it had hoped, it now considers that it is on the right track to achieve many of them.

Assessment by personnel and its representatives

Bearing in mind past events, union representatives feel that considerable progress has been made and that the new policy on recruitment and new training courses are combining to "help civilize" heads of department. Despite a considerable improvement in the situation, certain aspects of the behaviour of some heads of department is still not acceptable. Thanks to pressure from the staff and its representatives management will now take steps to ensure that the dignity of workers is respected.

Assessment by the firm of training consultants

The new management accords considerable importance to "human capital". This has led it to put great stress on training and internal communications in order to create a real corporate culture and to strengthen the dialogue with the social partners. Honesty and transparency are indispensable and the company's various magazines are used as vehicles to express them. The various training programmes have been designed not only to help each employee perform well in this job but also to give him job satisfaction.

Assessment by the author

Certain people interviewed expressed regret that Cora's image was still marred by the mistakes of earlier managements. However, the current management has another concept for managing its personnel. It has already invested a lot of time, effort and money in order to set up a complete programme for personnel management which is an integral part of the corporate project.

To recreate a good image is a long-term undertaking. No-one can say how long it will take to establish a positive general climate, especially after people have experienced such serious conflicts and worked in an atmosphere of complete lack of confidence between employers and employees.

Everybody is agreed that there is still a long way to go as far as training is concerned, particularly for the lower-grade staff. Nonetheless, the management hopes that staff will attend courses voluntarily, particularly the management game which has enjoyed an enormous amount of word-of-mouth publicity. The day will be won when all or almost all of the staff have attended various training programmes.

In the course of interviews the author was particularly struck by the enthusiasm of the people he met. Their way of looking to the future, of conceiving the management of a company, the importance attached to human qualities – all this drew to mind in a striking way the interview with the company chairman. Everyone in their own words expressed the same philosophy: "Here we believe more in people than in systems because it is the person that makes the difference".

5. Transferability

The study of the various training courses revealed a number of elements which could be useful to other companies:

Methodology:

- Give preference to courses with trainee participation;
- A game is an excellent teaching method if well devised and adapted to the subject (induced knowledge);
- Put the emphasis on practice rather than theory;
- Keep training sessions short by a sensible splitting-up of the programme;
- Give people time to put into practice what they have learned during the course itself or immediately afterwards.

Strategy:

- A training policy must go hand in hand with an effective and specific policy of communication in order to make participants understand the scope of training;
- Training courses can be compulsory or optional, depending on the case. Specific job training will be compulsory because this provides the minimum training required to ensure that a department works well. Other training courses may be made optional. This is a matter of strategic approach and staff motivation.

Motivation:

- Staff attending compulsory training courses must be clear as to the purpose of the training and its implications;
- Staff motivation is of capital importance for

optional training courses. It is important that everyone should be informed as to the existence of such courses, but the request to attend should come from the staff themselves.

Personnel department:
Maintaining a personal dossier for each individual member of staff is vital in order to monitor his progress on the basis of assessment reports.

Case study B: The Bricoman diy stores

1. General description of the company

1.1 Brief outline

Business activity begun in 1979
Company formed in 1982
Legal status: Société anonyme (company with liability limited by shares)
Equity held by: Louis Delhaize group (ECU 1,875,000 million) (Bfrs 75 million) on 31 December 1991
Type of business: Department store retailing
Type of products: Equipment and materials for DIY and gardening
Location: 3 stores in the southern part of Belgium and 1 in Luxembourg
Personnel: 192 on 31 March 1992 Sales: ECU 35 million (Bfrs 1.4 billion) on 31 December 1991

1.2 History of the company and recent strategy developments

The company started in business in 1979 as a "division" of the Louis Delhaize group. In order to better control its growth it became independent at the end of 1982 and acquired the legal status of a "Société anonyme" or a company with liability limited by shares.
At the time of change of status the "division" had financial difficulties with subsequent social tensions. The new management set about improving the situation on both the social and financial level. The following figures show the scope of the financial recovery:

	Sales (ex VAT) Bfrs m	Cash Flow Bfrs m	Number of stores
1984:	350	-2	2
1985:	400	23	2
1986:	480	33	2
1987:	520	37	2
1988:	600	49	2
1989:	650	77	3
1990:	1,090	118	3

The industrial tensions also quietened down.

Bricoman's commercial policy hinges on three criteria:

- *The "choice of the specialist"*: that is to say offering quality products that specialists recommend and use;
- *Wide ranging highly specialist range of goods:* Offer customers a wide choice (approximately 45,000 different items). The company offers a complete range of size, colour etc. for every type of product under one roof;
- *Assisted self-service:* offer a genuine specialist service to customers.

The company opened its fourth store in February this year. The permits necessary to open two more stores in the next two years have been obtained.

1.3 Structure of the company

The main characteristic as far as structure and organization is concerned is clearly decentralization with a structure that is not top-heavy, and short decision-making procedures. The hierarchical structure has only four levels:

1. General manager of the company:
   assisted by
   - a financial manager
   - 3 selectors
   - 2 administrative staff
2. The manager of each store:
   assisted by an assistant manager
3. The staff of each store:
   - 8 heads of department
   - the person responsible for taking delivery of goods
   - the person responsible for book-keeping
   - the person responsible for the personnel secretariat
4. Low-grade personnel of each store

Decentralization reflects in wide-ranging autonomy in the management of stores. Each store places its order for goods directly with the suppliers (on the basis of a list of goods drawn up by the selectors at head office) and goods are supplied direct (there is no central warehouse). Furthermore, a store manager is entitled to adjust prices in the light of local competition and the cultural environment and is not obliged to stock an article which is not appropriate to the needs of the region. Even so, the range of goods stocked by four stores overlapped by more than 90%.

At the same time, each store keeps its own accounts. Thanks to a very efficient and powerful computer programme, managers and department heads have daily information on sales, profits and, item-by-item on stocks.

1.4 Size and location

Since the beginning of the year the company has had 4 stores, 3 of which are in the southern part of Belgium and 1 in Luxembourg. As already mentioned, 2 other stores are planned for the next few years. The Bricoman company ranks 37th in the Belgian retail sector in the "Top 30 000" league for 1992 published by the trade magazine Trends-Tendances. The rankings are calculated on the basis of 1992 sales figures and includes the main companies in the sector. The average size of a store is 8,000 sq. metres.

1.5 Personnel

On 31 March, 1992 Bricoman employed 192 people, equivalent to 173 people working full-time.

Most of the people working part-time are women; as the table below shows, 44 out of 66 part-timers are women. However it is worth noting that a similar number of women, namely 48, work full-time.

a. Staff growth

Year	Number of stores	Number of physical persons	Number of persons full-time equivalent
1985	2	67	59
1986	2	73	62
1987	2	76	68
1988	2	88	79
1989	3	130	115
1990	3	138	123
1991	3	148	132
31.3.92	4	192	173

b. Staff breakdown

By gender		Working hours	
Men	100	Full-time	146
Women	92	Part-time[1]	46

By gender and working hours

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Men	98	2	100
Women	48	44	92
Total:	146	46	192

[1] "Part-time": means an average working time of 22 to 24 hours per week, i.e. 2/3 of a full-time working week.

1.6 Working conditions

The principal of decentralization also applies to working conditions, to permit local problems to be solved on the spot. The staff representatives of each store negotiate collective agreements with the manager. Wage scales are discussed and negotiated on the basis of job descriptions.
Similarly, the staff council and the safety and hygiene committee, which is also responsible for making the workplace more attractive are appointed locally.
Stores are open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.(on Fridays until 9 p.m.). Staff work one of two shifts alternately:

- 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (5 p.m. on Fridays)
- 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. (9 p.m. on Fridays)

Employees may exchange their working times with their colleagues by mutual agreement.
The general management is at present preparing an induction programme which will be followed by a new recruit on his first day with the firm.

1.7 Recruitment

As in other firms in the retail trade, lower grade personnel and cashiers are generally recruited from among a "risk population" with a fairly low level of education and a tendency to move from one job to the other.
Lower grade personnel clearly reveal one of two psychological attitudes:

- The "this is a job" attitude where work is seen simply as a means of earning money
- The "career-oriented" attitude where work is seen as bringing with it the possibility of advancement and promotion.

A cashier with the "this is a job" attitude would wish to remain a cashier whereas one with the "career-oriented" attitude would wish to advance by working in a department.
Students who are employed temporarily by the firm during peak or holiday periods are regarded as full members of the team and given the same training as other members of staff. In no way are they regarded as unskilled labourers who can only be given menial tasks.

2. Training policy

2.1 Training policy and structure: history and current situation

For the first few years of its existence the firm had only 2 stores and some 50 to 80 employees and was too small to develop a training policy. Training came into being as the firm expanded and as a result for specific needs for product knowledge. Recently a need has been felt to complement training by a basic course in management and commercial sense.
The management's current policy is to organize a pragmatic and participative form of training that is continuous and flexible and adapted to the needs of each store. Basically this covers three aspects:

- product training
- job-related training
- customer relations training (and management)

In the case of new employees the firm has a system of "mentors" using a senior employee from the department or service concerned. This person is selected because of the respect in which he is held by his colleagues, his technical competence, his human qualities and his loyalty to the group.
Training policy is closely linked to the way in which management functions in each store and is an integral part of the corporate culture that has recently been developed. It is, therefore, impossible to explain the structure of training and the courses themselves without explaining how a store is managed.

2.2 Impact of new technology on training

The impact here is almost nil. Computers, or to be more precise accountancy management software, are used as a means of management control that enables sales to be tracked day by day and profits to be assessed at quarterly intervals and compared with the company's financial planning and the performance of other stores.
The Bricoman management, as well as the general management of the Louis Delhaize group have adopted a very pragmatic approach in the matter. Computerization is considered as a very efficient management tool but not as an end in itself. On the other hand considerable emphasis is placed on the interpretation of results and consequent decisions rather than the quantity of items on a list generated by the machine.

2.3 Involvement of social partners in training

Because of the methodology decided upon, the social partners are not involved directly but indirectly influence training in that they take part in training meetings and their suggestions and recommendations are largely used and monitored.

2.4 Corporate culture, operation and training

As we have already pointed out, training is an integral part of the operation of the company and its corporate culture. The managing director of Bricoman summarizes this corporate culture in three words: "an ensign, a flame, and a flag", in other words the team spirit with the "we" more important than the "I" and pride in being a member of a group.
This team spirit is expressed day by day in the behaviour of staff and the vocabulary they use. Managers are seen as instructors and trainers rather than as arbiters because it is felt that praise is more important than reprimand.
The hierarchy and the symbols that generally go with it are discreet, effective and flexible without being lax. This form of management has a threefold origin:

- *Decentralization:* commercial management is left to heads of department
- *Confidence:* the keystone on which freedom of action rests
- *Competence:* leadership is based on the respect deriving from the technical confidence and human qualities of each manager.

Each new employee is welcomed by the store manager and the department manager or the person responsible for the section in which he will work. In the course of this interview he is given a brief explanation of how the store operates and a welcoming dossier.
He is then entrusted to a more senior employee who is also a senior member of his department. This system has a four-fold objective:

- To absorb the new recruit into the team
- To provide him with answers to the 1001 questions he wil have
- To induct him into his work and to provide him with initial training
- To advise him in the event of problems.

Emulation and competition is a daily event in each store. Staff inform themselves regularly as to the progress of sales in relation to target since they are anxious to see whether they will win. There is also a spirit of competition between individual stores, but this goes hand in hand with fair play – mutual assistance is more important within a single store and within the company.
The working procedures that each department manager must follow in order to fulfil his task in no way impede his freedom of action in general commercial matters. The structure is highly functional and was established to the advantage of everyone.

All procedures are set out in a managers' dossier. This dossier contains the job description for a manager. The management wants him above all to be a "foreman retailer".

- A foreman because he leads a team
- A retailer because the department is his shop and he has to run it like the owner
- He must conduct himself both as the person responsible and as the one who does the job. There is no question of his behaving in a dictatorial manner.

The job description also sets out the objectives of training which are summarized as: - To master commercial operations, then - To master financial management so as to transform the manager into a genuine business man.
This dossier contains a list of dates of management meetings, dates of inventories, dates of audit by the store manager, dates of audit by the selectors and in short all the dates of meetings throughout the year, so that people can plan their activities. Moreover, the dates are not changeable. Also included are specific company procedures such as those concerning reports of meetings, sales etc.
Every week the manager is required to organize a department meeting and to discuss with his staff some specific problem or matter concerning the department. However, it is important to suggest a solution to the problem. Minutes must be kept as a record of decisions taken. Solutions proposed by lower-grade staff tend to be more easily put into practice and are also forwarded to other stores.
The minutes of the department meeting is also the ticket qualifying the department manager for admission to the weekly meeting of managers with the store manager. These meetings always take place on a fixed day at a fixed time and last for about two hours. The agenda is drawn up on a pattern common to all stores amd generally includes the following points:

1. Comments on sales and profits for the past week
2. Stocks on shelves (figures and comments)
3. Progress of the current promotional campaign
4. Discussion of one or two questions about jobs common to all departments
5. Discussion of a subject concerning management in the broad sense of the word
6. Competition
7. The latest results of the suggestion scheme
8. Miscellaneous

Points 4 and 5 on the agenda provide an opportunity for training. The store manager prepares a brief document on the subjects listed and gives it to those attending the meeting who are in turn responsible for passing on the informatino to the staff in their department. Since training takes place during their own meeting it makes the meeting more interesting and it is awaited with interest. Thus training benefits from the positive and participative image of these meetings.
Product training is carried out in the department concerned, initially by the "mentor" and then by wholesalers and/or manufacturers of the products. In some cases it may be complemented by occasional factory visits. Clearly this training will vary from one department to another, whereas specific job training and welcoming customers are common to all departments.
It is generally accepted that a person will talk easily about his hobby or what he does well. The management decided to take advantage of this fact so that certain persons now have the supplementary role of trainer in addition to their principal function within the company. Communication works very well because it is carried out by a member of the group, is credible and can progress through example and concrete results.

3. Specific analysis of a store

3.1 General information

Location: In a Cora shopping centre with parking facilities, on the outskirts of a large town in the south of Belgium.
Size: 8,000 sq. metres.

This is the oldest store in the Bricoman chain but has been very recently redesigned. Passages between shelves have been widened for greater ease of circulation and natural light comes in through the roof. Piped music has been done away with and the atmosphere is much more relaxed as a result. The general management of the company has its offices in the same shopping centre.

3.2 Personnel

On 31 December 1991 this store employed 58 people, almost 35% of whom were part-time. In equivalent full-time terms the number of the staff is 49.

a. Staff growth

Year	Number of physical persons	Number of persons full-time equivalent
1985	39	33
1986	43	36
1987	45	39
1988	53	47
1989	49	44
1990	53	45
1991	58	49

b. Staff breakdown

By gender		Working hours	
Men	29	Full-time	38
Women	29	Part-time[1]	20

By gender and working hours

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Men	27	2	29
Women	11	18	29
Total	38	20	58

[1] "Part-time" means an average working time of 22 to 24 hours per week, i.e. 2/3 of a full-time working week.

The staff at this store are very stable and turnover is almost zero.

3.3 Social climate and corporate culture

After a period of tension and conflict the management and staff have in recent years managed to establish a climate of confidence. The ability of employer and employees to work together is governed by correctness of behaviour and mutual frankness. The two sides have undertaken not to defend the indefensible. Any fault or laxity must be done away with because they violate the team spirit and are contrary to corporate culture.

This store has a very strong team spirit marked both by the willingness with which people help one another and by the way in which any person behaving in a manner threatening to the group is excluded from it. The slogan of the store visited, which was proposed by the manager and adopted by the staff, sounds like a trade union slogan: "United in strength".

The team spirit and corporate culture which has resulted are very strong binding agents between management and staff and between individual employees. Absenteeism is a good barometer of the working climate within a company. The Bricoman store has an excellent atmosphere and absenteeism is zero.

3.4 Training

The training method chosen is ideally suited to the present climate of the company and of the store we look at. Since these are practical people it would be useless to make them attend long theoretical lectures and risk boring them.

The following are some of the subjects discussed last year:

Store organization:

Improvements in departments, tidying up reserve stock, preparing inventories, poor selling items, sales, dismantling after sales, taking care of equipment, renovation work, information, after sales service, dressing for work, respect for standard procedures etc.

Management and the retail business:

Communication: traps to avoid, tools favouring communication, how to use an information report, keeping calm in difficult situations, difficult customers, questioning techniques, effective conversation by telephone, how to react to complaints from customers, the financial planning for 1992, respect for a person you are talking to, "5 centimes to make 100 francs", keep smiling, the "friendly service" campaign, window dressing programme etc.

Training is continuous and relates to matters which can be put into practice immediately and the results measured very soon. The store manager discussed the questions listed above with his department managers at the weekly meetings and a summary of what he has said was included in the minutes of the meeting. Each department manager in his turn discussed this subject with his staff. At their department meeting (also held at weekly intervals). Thus having himself been trained, the manager becomes the trainer, forcing him to look well at the subject and analyze it before explaining it to his staff. The message is very well accepted by staff because it is passed on by one of themselves and may be put into effect immediately. Moreover, the results are there to show its efficacy.

This continued training is important because it is also a means of internal promotion. It is appropriate at this point to mention a function which is important although unassuming, namely that of the assistant manager. This person generally reaches his post by internal promotion. It is not an appointment that is made light-heartedly because the assistant is not simply considered as the manager's sidekick. On the contrary, manager and assistant manager form a real team. The function and the appointment to assistant manager is important because it is not an end in itself but a stage in a person's career. If a person is assistant manager it is because the general management considers that one day this person will be capable of taking on the responsibilties of store manager.

3.5 Involvement of the social partners in training

Although the staff representatives are not directly involved in the choice of training subjects, the management, as we have seen above, do contribute directly to the training process.

The staff representative interviewed told us about the various courses which he had attended during his career with Bricoman. He also attended a union course because he had managed to arrange for working hours to be credited in order to attend a two-year course on social welfare legislation. This training took place outside the firm. As far as training organized by the firm is concerned, the union representative mentioned:

- The adoption of new recruits by a senior member of the department (continuing training);
- Training by suppliers; technical information on products organized by the suppliers themselves. A technical presentation is followed by a question-and-answer session lasting several hours;
- Visits to suppliers' firms: very instructive because one becomes more familiar with the supplier on his home ground: how he works, working atmosphere (1 day);
- Training on packaging: its importance and how to read it (1/2 day);
- Training in stock management and turnover (1 day);
- Continuing training by the department manager.

He had also attended two courses which are no longer held:

- the Salesman's course lasting a day. This is a psychological approach to customers and is very useful to help avoid conflicts.
- Sales promotion by displaying goods at both ends of a row of shelving.

Although this training in displaying goods is now no longer given by an outside company it is still given by the union representative who is considered a champion in the field; he invariably wins any inter-store or interdepartmental competitions.

Continuing training is very well regarded by the

staff. It has become so much part of day-to-day life that it has more or less become second nature.
To ensure optimum dialogue with the social partners at the technical level such as already exists at the level of communications, the staff representative would like the managers and assistant managers and particularly the person responsible for personnel to follow a course of social welfare law. At present he has the impression of giving them news rather than discussing with them.
Purely by way of information the staff representative wished to define for readers of this report the quality of the relationship between the social partners in the various stores of the company by giving them a mark. This mark varies from 7 out of 10, to 10 out of 10 (the maximum being gained by the store we studied, which is also the oldest in the chain). However, he pointed out that this in no way means that there is agreement on everything and that the unions have nothing else to demand, but it does explain the quality of communication and dialogue between employer and employees because of the mutual confidence in the other person's word.

4. Assessment

Assessment by the company

Given the fact that the hierarchical structure of the Bricoman company is not top-heavy, the management decided to take full advantage of the slimness and flexibility of the company's management to create an effective and inexpensive system of staff training.
This training is intimately linked with the mode of operation and management of each store and the corporate culture. It takes place locally but in a global company environment. Training also puts the accent on the importance of the group rather than the individual.
Training on the mentor principle has been very well received. Weekly information sessions have also been well received because the information can be immediately applied and the staff are able to judge its effectiveness for themselves.
Audit visits are looked at rather as a means of encouragement rather than as disciplinary operation. The visits by the chairman of the group do not generate fear. On the contrary, heads of department are proud to show them their work and explain any changes or innovations.

Absenteeism is a good means of measuring the staff's general satisfaction; in this store absenteeism is almost zero.

Assessment by the staff and their representatives

According to the union representative, the three best forms of individual training are, in decreasing order:

1. The mentor system;
2. Training by suppliers;
3. Salesman training.

The mentor system begins as soon as a new employee joins the firm. Training by suppliers would be more useful after the probation period, whereas the salesman training should be provided after a person has been with the firm a year (this particular training course is no longer given, to the great regret of the union representative who found it very helpful).
The specific training subject discussed by heads of department at the weekly departmental meeting is not looked at as a form of training but more as an element vital to the life and performance of the team.

Assessment by the author

The visit to the store enabled me to see the high degree of assimilation of training points discussed by the management of previous year.
The visit to the goods delivery point where between 60 and 80 trailers/semi-trailers arrive each day, showed it to be very well organized and clean. Similarly a visit to the reserve stock, which was also in perfect order showed that the training on organization had been well assimilated and was bearing fruit. The cleanliness and tidiness is the same as that found in the departments themselves.
Customers are attended to rapidly and in a friendly manner. Similarly staff are ready to assist customers. A person who was clearly looking for something different was not left long without an offer of help. During slack periods, as soon as more than five people form a queue at a check-out point another check-out is immediately opened. Obviously all check-outs are open in peak periods.
The atmosphere of the store is very calm and quiet (there is no piped music) the natural light softens the artificial light, passages between shelves are wide, despite the enormous need for extra floor space to display goods), the whole range of articles available is clearly and pleasantly presented, labelling is correct, staff are not pushy but helpful, everything contributes to create an image of genuine professionalism.
The department managers and even the lower-grade staff keep a day-to-day check on sales figures and compare them with the target set. The staff challenged themselves and intends to succeed!
During the day spent with the firm and in the store and in the course of various meetings the author was struck by the enthusiasm and genuine spirit of belonging to a group expressed by everyone he met in different words but in the same spirit.
Everything shows clearly that training, corporate culture and the quality of communication have attained their objectives: an effective and high-performing organization in which human beings take priority: freedom of action, confidence, room for initiative and job satisfaction working in a team.

5. Transferability

This case study of a Diy chain revealed the following points:

Methodology:

- The mentor system gives excellent results.
- Training should be participative.
- Training sessions should be short.
- A written summary of the subject studied is a useful complement to the course itself.
- The opportunity to put theoretical knowledge into practice rapidly ensures better assimilation.

2.

Psychology:
- The competence and standing of the "mentor" are of major importance for the success of this type of training.
- Feedback is a guarantee of successful training.
- The sense of belonging to a group reinforces the impact of training.

Motivation:
- To be a member of a group or a team and wish to remain so strengthens any action undertaken for the group's benefit.
- Competition encourages team spirit and the will to win.
- A reward, winning the game, the honour of winning or a possible promotion are strong motivating forces.

Strategy:
It is not necessarily the value of the means used that guarantees the success of a programme but rather on the one hand the suitability of a series of internal elements – the global corporate strategy, good internal communications, optimum use of available resources, and a genuine climate of confidence between the social partners.
And on the other hand staff motivation and aspirations.

PART 3:

General conclusions

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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

3.

1. Selection of cases for study

We start with the reminder that we proposed two types of case for study, the first being the specific training organized by federations of enterprises for their members within a given sector and the second the case of large companies. Unfortunately, the two cases finally selected for study were both large firms.

1.1 Planning and design of training

From the case studies it can be concluded that large retail firms now have training programmes or are trying to set them up.
The reason for developing such programmes seems to be the imminence of the single European market in 1993, growing competition and the belief that consumers in the nineties will be seeking quality and not merely the cheapest products. Consequently, large retail firms are trying to develop new strategies in different fields: in marketing, finance, with a strict control of costs, and personnel management by encouraging motivation and competence.
In order to develop these new strategies, they need to improve the vocational skills of their employees by means of training programmes. Employees in the retail sector traditionally have rather a low level of education. Moreover, job satisfaction in the retail sector is low because of the repetitive nature of the work involved.
The objectives of training programmes in the retail sector are as follows:

- To sell more professionally and give the customer better service.

Staff have to be seen as an integral part of the new commercial strategies, especially since customers' demands are changing.

- To improve the quality of management

With competition increasing, an improvement in management is crucial; new technology must be used for this purpose.

1.2 Personnel requiring training

From the case studies it would seem that training programmes are offered not only to new employees but also to existing staff. Moreover, all the levels of the hierarchy are involved. Here specific mention should be made of Bricoman with its interesting and low-cost training programme: a weekly two-hour meeting of department managers with the general manager to discuss a number of questions, including a short training topic which department managers are then expected to discuss with their staff.
Part-timers, who in the main, are women cashiers, are also allowed - or obliged - to attend training courses. This is due largely to the introduction of new technology to improve store management.
However, it must not be forgotten that some retail firms have a very high rate of staff turnover - explainable by part-time working and conditions of employment.

1.3 Content, method and organization of training

The content, method and organization of training differ from one group to the other and even from one chain of stores to another within the same group. The Louis Delhaize case is a very good example of the differences which can exist within a single group.
Training programmes need to be adapted to the culture of the enterprise.
In-house training or external training? The larger companies have a training unit and other companies are trying to develop one with a limited number of employees. While it is essential to keep control of training programmes, this does not mean that every part of a training programme has to take place in-house.
The general trend would seem to be to carry out continuing vocational training in-house.
As has already been mentioned, training courses seem to accord a place to both general subjects and to training in specific skills. The global training programme of group X is a good example. One course has the general aim of:

- making cashiers aware of the importance of how they handle customers and of the different techniques involved;
- teaching them how to deal intelligently with customers' complaints;
- motivating staff and making them conscious of the value of their work.

Moreover, if we look at the set of programmes examined in the context of the case studies, we may conclude that training is generally more customer and management-oriented than skill-oriented.
The duration of training courses is generally short. It is felt that sessions should not be too long in order to assure that trainees' full attention is held. When a programme is extensive and covers a long period of time, it is generally subdivided into smaller units, each covering one specific topic.
As far as the transferability of information gained in the case studies is concerned, the only possibility in our view would be to select and present a number of key elements which might be of interest to other companies, as we have done at the end of each case study.

The principal points from the point of view of transferability are:

- Methodology

  Short sessions are preferable to formal lectures. Courses should cover both practical and theoretical aspects.

  It is important to give all trainees an opportunity to practise, especially in the case of computer training.

  The "mentor" system seems to be very useful for new employees and is well accepted.

  A written summary of course material is useful.

- Psychology

  When training is organized for a large group of participants with various backgrounds and educational levels, the training programmes should be broken down into modules so as to meet the specific needs and expectations of the various sub-groups.

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The "mentor" must be an employee respected by the others and competent in his job.

The sense of belonging to a group strengthens the impact of training.

Rapid feedback is a guarantee of success.

- Motivation

  Motivation should be a criterion for admission for all employees applying to attend an optional training course.

  The objectives and benefits of training for employees should be clearly defined;

  Reward is essential.

- Strategy

  Communication is a vital element, especially when starting a new programme of staff training: employees should be informed of the importance of training and the benefits they can expect to gain from it.

  The national and regional employment services (whose role in the training system is described in the national survey) can play a role in certain types of training. They can collaborate with firms in setting up programmes. In the case of firm X the global training programme will be set up with the aid of the regional employment service (FOREM).

The role of the trade unions would seem to be limited so far as training programmes are concerned. Union representatives wish to be consulted about programmes and not merely informed about them through their representatives on the staff council. Moreover only firms with more than 100 employees are obliged to have a staff council.

The 0.25% regulation – a sum equal to 0.25% of salaries in any sector has to be spent on training or employment of so-called "risk groups" – cf. the national survey – is the result of a national agreement. As yet it is too early to access the impact of this regulation on the training system.

1.4 Cost, financing and development

No cost/benefit analysis of vocational training was possible for the case studies. Apparently the firms concerned had not carried out any detailed analysis. Clearly, however, the managers are able to say if a programme has been successful or not. Case study X gives some examples of unsuccessful programmes.

Nevertheless, the case studies seem to indicate that continuing vocational training will experience some development in the future for the reasons already mentioned – the coming of the single European market, growing competition, and changing consumer behaviour.

Finally, according to the unions there is likely to be a tendency for the number of hours worked per week by part-timers to increase – particularly in the case of those working both as cashiers and display assistants.

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FLEMISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN BELGIUM

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INTRODUCTION

This final report includes

- a summary of the national survey of the Belgian retail sector,
- a summary of two case studies concerning two selected large retailing concerns
- the overall conclusions.

The national sector survey was written by
Ignace Pollet of HIVA, Louvain
and has been translated into French and adapted
by the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation
PME of the University of Liège.

The case studies were prepared by
R. Michel, an associate of the Centre PME.

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this study is to sketch an overall picture of the schooling and training activities of employees in the Belgian retail trade sector. To this end, in the first part we deal with the current state of affairs within the sector (industrial structure, employment, legislation, school system and training). The second and third parts are devoted to two studies that have been selected with a view to their exemplary character in terms of company efforts to provide training for employees.

This study is part of the Task Force programme of the same name that is being implemented within the twelve EC member states. The methodology and manner of reporting are set down beforehand by the Task Force. For this Belgian report there is also a French language counterpart, containing the sector study (identical to this one, though with annotations for the specific Walloon situation), and two Walloon case studies.

The Higher Institute for Labour Studies is responsible for this report. Ignace Pollet wrote the sector study and the 'Incobé' case study. The 'X' case study is by Mieke Van Gramberen. The project director is Jan Denys.

The researchers wish to express their appreciation to the directors of the companies involved for the authorization to carry out the case studies. Furthermore, we are also grateful to the 31-member advisory commission for the suggestions, advice and corrections provided at the inception and conclusion of this study.

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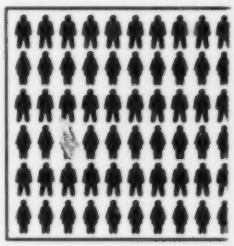

1. Definition and limits of the sector
2. Structure and characteristics of retailing
3. The institutional and social context
4. Employment and labour
5. Changing conditions and their implications for skill requirements and training
6. Training and recruitment
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1. DEFINITION AND LIMITS OF THE SECTOR

The activities within the range 52.1 to 52.6 of the European classification of industries coincide with the current 'NACE' classification (General Nomenclature of Economical Activities in the European Community) for the two-digit level codes 64 and 65 with the exclusion of codes 651 and 652.

The NACE-codes 651 and 652 cover the retail trade in cars, motorbikes, spare parts of motorized vehicles, motor fuel and lubricant.

Restaurants, bars, hotels and any other shops providing meals, drinks or accommodation are not included. The various types of repair shops are also not included.

This NACE-classification serves as an axis for the statistical data on employment published by RIZIV or INAMI (National Health Insurance Service) and RSZ or ONSS (National Service of Social Welfare).
Besides this, there is another classification, which is commonly used and which is based on the fields of competence of the sectorial joint industrial committees. These joint committees (in which employers and employees are equally represented) have a considerable say in labour conditions and salaries of the personnel in the companies involved. Unfortunately the joint committees concerned (five altogether) and their respective domains of competence are not classified in accordance with the distinction between retail and wholesale trade.

2. STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RETAILING

1.

2.1 Recent history

Although a full-length history of the Belgian retailing trade system could prove to be a fascinating undertaking, we 'll limit ourselves to a concise outline that goes back no further than the year 1937. In order to ensure the survival of small shopkeepers (and thereby avoiding uncontrollable social and political unrest), the then ruling government passed a law that became commonly known as the 'Grendelwet' (Barring Act).

This act prohibited the starting up of retail businesses (or expansion of existing shops) which employ either more than five persons in the bigger towns or more than three persons in the smaller communities. Originally meant to be applied for a short period only, the act was prolonged repeatedly until its abolition in 1961.

It is believed that the sluggishness of development of the Belgian retail sector is due to this legislation (Leunis and De Vos, 1986). The modernization of the sector took place only in the sixties. Ever since, both wholesale and retail entrepreneurs have been expanding their businesses, introducing new techniques and catching up with the competition from abroad. More specifically, we've seen a steady growth in the number of supermarkets, hypermarkets and shopping centres, while, formally, the emphasis would gradually shift towards self-service. Along with this development came a new wave of legislation aimed at price-control, opening hours, consumer protection and the setting up of businesses.

Then came the economic recession of the late seventies which continued throughout the eighties. The crisis was a severe blow for the Belgian economy, which has been largely open to foreign trade and was traditionally export-oriented. As for the retail trade, the crisis encouraged a greater use of new technologies (scanning, electronical payment,) but also in different strategies with respect to the consumer market (diversification, flexibility in opening hours, new locations, ...). Detailed information (numbers and forms) for the Belgian retail sector is given in the following paragraph but the following is a summary of the general trend over the last decade:

- new technologies affect both the flow of money and the flow of goods. Apart from scanning and the use of bar codes, we find quite a number of new developments, such as distance-selling, distance-buying, automated payment (credit cards, homebanking), automated business-mailing (order forms, invoice, delivery demands, ...);

- one can easily assess a growing tendency to concentration, both in food- and non-food retailing: an ever-increasing share of the consumer market is being increasingly dominated by a smaller number of stores. This is particulary to be observed in the breakthrough of franchising, which allows well-known companies to enlarge their market share without having to invest heavily;

- there has also been a change in people's attitude towards shopping, operating at one extreme to the benefit of hypermarkets with their low prices, self-service and rapid shopping and at the other extreme to that of the specialized small shops offering a high standard of service and exclusive high-quality products. For the old-fashioned department stores which suddenly found themselves in the 'dead centre' of these market-innovations, the prospects look rather bleak. Unless they show themselves able to adopt an original form offering cheap, practical goods or highly specialized products, their share of the market impact is bound to diminish;

- the main changes, however, are not simply to be reduced to 'economies of scale' and 'specialized shops'. We now see the emergence of 'shops inside the shop', notably within the hypermarkets which are trying to shed their image of uniformity with the motto of "diversification" (by which is meant methods of selling and not of products). Second thoughts are emerging at the other extreme as well. The shopping streets of urban centres seem to attract mainly firms of national or international repute. This phenomenon, which sends rents per square metre spiralling, means a decreasing range of goods on offer;

- about every publication on the subject mentions the irreversible process of internationalization of the retail sector, which leads to a number of distinguishable strategies, such as the creation of multinationals, holdings and global-market approaches (uniformity of product);

- another feature is that of the 'hollow company', this is the sort of company, or hypermarket, which limits its activities to the mere buying and selling of non-immaterial services. All other activities would, in this case, be contracted out to more specialized companies (organizing the supplies, gathering data, lease and rent of real estate, etc.).

The whole pattern of innovative strategies given above is a response to some important socio-demographic changes which we can only mention briefly here:

- the increase of female employment limits the time that a household can spend on shopping and makes one-stop-shopping an increasingly viable option;

- the growing importance of the ageing population (a large proportion of which is financially well-off and quality-conscious) requires a more personalized approach;

- an ever-rising number of people are to be categorized as 'single'; this creates a significant demand for ready-made food, smaller portions, etc.;

Abbreviations we use are: FEDIS (The representative employers' organization of both the retail and the wholesale distribution sector); NCMV (the representative organization of all Small and Medium Enterprises); CAO (Collective Labour Agreement); SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises).

- nowadays, the patterns of consumption are more easily put into categories than they used to be; this means that individuals look for other ways of expressing their personality; exclusive consumer-goods play an important role here. Substantial sums are set aside for the promotion of clothes, fashion, design, etc.) (Persoons, 1990; Fedis, 1988; Marstboom, 1989; Valenduc, 1991; Van Den Abeele, 1986).

2.2 Facts and figures

We'll start with a concise overview of the economic situation within the sector. The first table gives an idea of the relative importance of the 'classical' subsectors, as they appear in the statistics.

Table 1 - Comparison of annual turnover: retail sector and subsectors (in billions of franks)

Sector	1981	1985	1990
Food	497	702	804
Non-food	860	1,101	1,374
Independent retailers	1,101	1,443	1,714
including supermarkets	*48*	*50*	*61*
Hypermarkets and department stores	75	147	157
Chain (or franchised) stores	173	208	306
Consumer cooperatives	7	4	1
Total retail	1,357	1,803	2,179
Total consumer spending	2,398	3,198	4,158

Source: National Statistical Institute - FEDIS, 1991

It should be noted that fuel and automobiles aren't included in any of the figures. The overall importance of independent retailers persisted throughout the eighties, while the early eighties boom of hypermarkets slowed down somewhat by the end of the decade. Franchising, on the other hand, seems to be on the way up.

Annually, the marketing group Nielsen does a survey of general foodstores. In this survey, the term 'general foodstore' covers any retail shop that fulfils the following criteria:

a. offers a diverse range of food categories;

b. annual turnover surpassing 400,000 Bfrs;

c. food accounts for more than 40% of turnover.

The survey shows a steady decline in the number of foodstores, while their turnover is still rising.

Although these figures look somewhat contradictory at first sight (and we have not checked their reliability), they lead us to conclude that concentration in the Belgian retail sector is on a par with neighbouring countries, while at the same time a comparatively large number of traditional shops continue to exist. Small and medium-sized firms constitute a respectable share of this market.

Table 2 - General food store: number and annual turnover (billion Bfrs)

Year	Number	Turnover
1965	46,000	64
1970	34,900	92
1975	23,900	178
1980	18,400	286
1985	15,600	402
1989	14,000	454

Source: Nielsen A.C. - FEDIS, 1991

Table 3 - Comparison of business indicators (retail sector) between Belgium and neighbouring countries

	a	b	c	d
Belgium	11.5	179.3	68%	3,108
Netherlands	6.0	63.1	79%	2,323
Germany	6.8	190.5	33%	3,076
France	7.5	154.5	65%	3,335
United Kingdom	6.0	63.1	66%	2,127

with a number of shops per 1,000 habitants in 1988;
b surface area of supermarkets/hypermarkets per 1,000 habitants;
c share of the first ten in total distribution (1990);
d yearly retail turnover per capita (thousands fr., 1988).

Source: 'Panorama of EC industry 1990' and 'Nielsen A.C.' quoted in Valenduc, 1991

The effects of the growing internationalization cannot be characterized as all one way, but no-one can deny that foreign groups seem to penetrate the Belgian consumer market more successfully than Belgian groups do abroad. The largest Belgian retail concern (Delhaize Lion) ranks just 19th in the European top 500 chart. On the other hand we find that there are 49 foreign chain stores that have established a foothold in Belgium, 27 of which are of Dutch origin (with 7 French, 5 British, 3 American and 3 Italian); making a total of 1,719 shops (an impressive 551 of which are French) (Marstboom, 1988).

The biggest retail companies in Belgium are the GB group, Delhaize le lion, Macro (Dutch), Colruyt, Cora, Match, Sarma, Aldi, Mestdagh.

2.3 New or alternative forms of retailing

In a previous paragraph (2.1) we mentioned the occurrence of new strategies with respect to the consumer market. Here we take a brief look at what their concrete significance is in Belgian retailing.

Mail-order firms

The significance of mail-order firms in the Belgian market is quite modest indeed. Their combined turnover in 1990 was a mere 24.6 billion Bfrs with a direct employment of about 3,500 people (for pur-

poses of comparison it is worth mentioning that the French mail-order company La Redoute alone employs 7,000 people). However mail order firms' share in the retail trade is growing gradually (from 0.95% in 1980 to an estimated 1.45% in 1990 – fuel and automobiles not included). A recent study of the sector reveals that most of the mail-order companies are too specialized (42% of the firms offer one type of product). They probably will have to diversify in order to meet the challenge of the nineties.

Direct sales

Direct sales is the trade form in which the seller addresses himself directly to the buyer in order to offer goods or services. Common examples include door-to-door selling, demonstration selling and sales in response to consumer demand. Direct sales sometimes has the infamous reputation of using illegal persuasive techniques. As a business method, it is nevertheless common practice in Japan and the US. In Belgium the direct sales accounts for a yearly turnover of about 9 billion Bfrs, which amounts to 0.45% of the total retail sales. According to their own estimations, direct sales companies provide work for 9,000 people, a majority of whom are independent retailers.

Franchising

The idea of franchising is that separate enterprises sign a contract, by means of which one company can use the other one's trademark. By exchanging the use of trademarks, labels, logos, etc. for money, the franchisee is able to represent himself as being part of a large-scale organization while remaining independent. The formula combines the flexibility, adaptability and personal approach of a small firm with the experience, know-how and all the advantages of a larger scale firm. In Belgium franchising accounts for 100 billion Bfrs or a substantial 5% of retailing. We find there are 120 franchise-givers and 7,000 franchise-takers. Not at all a bad figure, if one compares it with neighbouring countries: The Netherlands 215/6,800, Germany 278/20,000, Great Britain 348/20,000 and France 600/33,000 (source: CAP, 1991).

Franchising companies in Belgium include Unic, Nopri, Christiaensen, 3 Suisses, Phildar, Bricocenter, Quick, Yves Rocher, etc.

3. INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

3.1 Legislation

Opening hours

Since legislation on opening hours affects labour conditions of staff and personnel in a direct way, we find it useful to sum up the three main sources of such legislation in Belgium.

- Law of 22th June 1960 on the weekly day of rest (retail sector only).
  This law establishes only the major guidelines and leaves the decision as to whether and when this day of rest should be enforced to the social partners (e.g. for bakeries on Mondays). A day of rest normally lasts 24 hours but doesn't necessarily start at 5 a.m. It is assumed that this day of rest is Sunday if no other day is specified.

- Law of 16th March 1971 on Sunday work (part of the so-called Labour Act).
  This law applies to all shops, businesses and factories with employees. Often changed or amended, the law now states that it is forbidden for employees to work on Sunday afternoons. The exemptions are nominal, but it is generally understood that shops can open their doors on Sundays three times a year. During the last couple of years, this law has been the subject of dispute between major retailers and trade unions, with each talking 'flexibility'. Sometimes, hypermarkets kept their doors open when a flood of customers was expected, thus deliberately breaking the law. Obviously this law works to the benefit of the small retailer without employees.

- Law of 24th July 1973.
  Closing time is mandatory at 8 p.m., with the option of staying open once a week until 9 p.m. There's a growing demand for late opening hours (due to changing lifestyles: full-time employed women, more single-person households, etc.). For the moment, a number of stores stay open late and their doing so is tolerated by the authorities who see it as an opportunity for small traders to hold their own against the growing competition from larger firms. Gradually we are coming to see the first signs of a demand for 'night shops' as well.

Regulation of trade and commerce

This heading should cover the whole range of legislation concerning the starting up of distribution businesses, regulation of competition, prices, quality standards, consumer protection, etc. Since there is an abundance of laws, decrees, European guidelines, not to mention regional, local and internal regulations, we shall confine ourselves to the two main legislative acts.

- Act on Trade Practices, 14th of July 1971.
  This law regulates the principles of sale, prices, products, quantities and all items with regard to a fair treatment of both retailers and consumers. This law has given rise to a great number of decrees and specifications. Aside from the European guidelines, it still constitutes the main body of reference for trade reglementation.

- Act on Business Establishments, 29th of June 1975 ('inplantingswet').
  This law regulates all applications to establish new or enlarge existing sales outlets. Occupancy of territory and density of sales outlets in the local neighbourhood are the criteria. The effects of the law were soon felt; the number of hypermarkets ceased to continue its almost exponential rise (from 16 to 70 in the period 1970-1975; 70 to 77 in the period 1975-1980).

Retailer qualifications

Although qualifications are dealt with in chapter 5 of this report, we must mention a recent decree (24 January 1990) which from now on requires every would-be retailer, in order to obtain the 'distribution permit', to possess some minimum qualifications: lower secondary school or apprenticeship in a retail shop or at least three years experience in running a business. The decree notes that those criteria are met as well when an employee of the applicant fulfils the requirements. This legislation opens a new chapter in entrepreneurship: a person can no longer start up a shop without a certain minimum degree of qualification (Fedis, 1988; Marstboom, 1989; NCMV, s.d.; Leunis, 1986).

3.2 The role of the social partners

The participation of the social partners in decisions affecting employment and training roughly comes down to the 0.25%legislation. This means: 0.25% of the combined salaries of any sector has to be spent on training or employment of so-called risk-groups. It is up to the joint committee of the sector to work out a programme for this purpose on the basis of a Collective Labour Agreement. In the case of absence of a Collective Labour Agreement, the central administration has the right to collect the corresponding amounts.
For the period 1992-1993, a Collective Labour Agreement was reached for the white-collar workers in retail trade in the joint committees: 312 (department stores), 201 (grocery stores with branch stores) and 311 (retail shops). The 0.25% resources thus made available are being devoted to the following three projects:

1. 0.09% is reserved for employment bonuses/premiums/subsidies for contracts of indefinite duration and for risk groups, providing that the persons recruited have been on the job for at least six months (bonus/premium/subsidy of 100,000 Bfrs);
2. 0.12% must be used for the installation of child care facilities;
3. the remaining 0.04% is intended for paid educational leave for part-time employees who are not included in the regular system of educational leave. A collective labour agreement has also been reached for blue-collar workers (joint committee 201).

Here the emphasis is entirely on employment premiums/bonuses/subsidies and child care. In the opinion of the trade union officials involved, there are not really any provisions for the unskilled workers. Companies cannot make direct use of the 0.25 resources for internal company training programmes.

4. EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

1.

4.1 Composition of the workforce

We shall look at the main characteristics of the retail sector and then of the various segments. However, we can only give a very general idea here because, as we explained in section 1, Belgian statistics on the subject do not show figures for the retail sector separately.

It is clear that the retail sector is predominantly female, white-collar and thriving on part-timers. Moreover, we know that 58.2% of the female workers work part-time (compared with only 10% of the men).

Table 4 - Retail sector: number of wage-earners by gender, term and contract

White-collar workers	Male	Female	Total
Part-time	3,482	48,876	52,358
Full-time	27,600	37,719	65,319
Total	31,082	86,595	117,677
Blue-collar workers	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Part-time	3,031	7,716	10,747
Full-time	14,983	4,420	19,403
Total	18,014	12,136	30,150
Total (white- and blue-collar)	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Part-time	6,513	56,592	63,105
Full-time	42,583	42,139	84,722
Total	49,199	98,810	148,009

Source: RIZIV, 1989

The 'RIZIV'-employment figures for 30th of June 1989 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the composition of the workforce for 'NACE' codes 64 and 65 with exclusion of 651 and 652 (for RIZIV and NACE see section 1): those figures (total of 150,000) are categorized in terms of gender (male/female), term of employment (full-time/part-time) and contract (white-collar/blue-collar).

The figures are easier to read if put into percentages.

Table 5 - Comparison of retail sector with total private sector: percentage wage-earners by gender, term and contract

Sub-group	% retail sector	% tot. priv. sector
Male	33.2	0.3
Female	66.8	39.7
Total	100.0	100.0
Part-time	42.7	21.1
Full-time	57.3	78.9
Total	100.0	100.0
White-collar workers	79.5	58.4
Blue-collar workers	20.4	41.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: RIZIV, 1989

Table 6 shows the significance of retailing within the whole private sector.

Table 6 - Retail wage-earners as a percentage of all wage-earners in private sector: per sub-group

Sub-group retail	% of total
Male	2.65
Female	8.07
White-collar workers	6.53
Blue-collar workers	2.35
Total retail	4.80

Source: RIZIV, 1989

So far, we have taken in account only employees (wage earners), while the self-employed naturally form an equally substantial part of the employment in retailing. Since the self-employed workers are subject to a totally different social welfare system, they are not included in the RIZIV-figures nor in any other statistics of an official character. We thus have to rely on the employment figures provided by FEDIS (the Retail Traders Federation).

Table 7 - Total employment in retail sector 1988

	Number	Percentage
Employed	165,058	66.2
Self-employed	84,169	33.8
Total	249,227	100.0

Source: FEDIS, 1991

Although the subsectors fuel and automobiles are left aside, the number of people employed is higher than in the RIZIV-statistics. On the other hand, we now have some idea of the importance of the self-employed in the retail trade.

In their annual report, the Retail Traders Federation FEDIS (1991) sums up a number of figures comparing the workforce per subsector for the years 1976, 1982, 1987 and 1988. Those figures indicate a steady rise of employment in the retail sector (con-

Table 8 - Employment in the retail sector and subsectors: 1976–1988

Sector/group	1976	1982	1987	1988
Retail trade				
People employed				
- food	41,315	52,825	68,053	73,346
- non-food	53,284	53,793	57,641	64,246
- varied products	41,005	41,520	27,695	27,466
- motor vehicles	5,712	3,602	3,734	4,397
- pharmacies	6,532	7,138	7,869	8,581
Total	147,448	158,878	164,992	178,036
Self-employed				
- food	34,754	29,800	28,026	26,662
- non-food	46,547	49,714	56,317	56,490
- varied products	909	942	988	1,017
- motor vehicles	10,378	10,757	11,359	10,426
- pharmacies	2,787	~ 2,294	2,245	2,071
Total	95,375	93,507	98,935	96,666
Total retail	242,823	252,385	263,927	274,702
Total wholesale	196,701	183,737	192,919	201,833
Total wholesale/retail trade	439,524	436,122	456,846	476,535

Source: CRB, quoted in FEDIS, 1991

Table 9 - Comparison of number of employed coming under three joint committees: 1981-1990 (estimated figures)

Joint committee	1981	1985	1990
Large specialist retail firms	12,100	13,200	15,100
Food multiples	23,000	26,000	28,800
Large multiple department stores	38,200	33,000	27,850

Source: Social Funds of the respective joint committees quoted by FEDIS, 1991

Table 10 - Employment (wage-earners) in the food sector by size of enterprise (1989)

Size	Number of employers	Employees	Percentage total
1 - 4 employees	2,019	3,195	7.1
5 - 9	324	2,159	4.8
10 - 19	300	4,215	9.3
20 - 49	238	7,070	15.6
50 - 99	11	673	1.5
100 - 199	4	562	1.2
200 - 499	6	2,480	5.4
500 - 999	5	3,440	7.6
1,000 +	6	21,311	47.2
Total	2,913	45,105	100.0

Source: Social Fund food distribution + our own calculations

trary to a downfall in the wholesale) but they fail to provide any qualitative information (about possible concentration, specialization, etc.).
A more detailed analysis is not really an option. To add the employment statistics randomly made available by the sectoral joint industrial committees would only make for further confusion. Nevertheless, to illustrate some of the tendencies in retailing we stated under 2.1, we compare the trend of the workforce during the eighties for three sectoral joint committees.
One can see that some old forms of retailing, notably department stores are on the decline, while the large specialist stores (along with many SME's) are standing their ground. The impact of the SME's on the employment figures can be read in the following table, which only covers the food sector.

It is the small and the very large companies together that account for the vast bulk of employment. The 20-49 category certainly represents the boom in franchising. The 'middle section' (50-99 and 100-199) is virtually empty.

4.2 Working conditions

The publications of Valenduc and Vendramin (1991) and Vendramin (1990) provide some insight into the working conditions and, more specifically, the different aspects of part-time work within the sector. With the backing of the Institute Fondation Travail et Université, the authors organized a survey in the french-speaking part of Belgium and came to the following conclusions:

- the sector appears to be a model of flexibility as only 44% of the employees have fixed daily working hours (only 33% of the part-time employees);
- 58% of the respondents in the sample do work part-time (70% of the female respondents);
- the jobs most often performed on a part-time basis are cashiers (almost exclusively women) and window dressers;
- two thirds of the part-timers work between 18 and 24 hours per week;
- 41% of the part-time employees express the wish to work full-time;
- 69% of those working variable hours would prefer to work fixed hours.

Another aspect of relevance lies in the transformation of jobs by a change of tools or, rather, the introduction of new technologies. Valenduc & Vendramin give as an example the case of scanning (electronic product reading) which has a great effect on the working conditions of the cashiers. On the organization chart, the cashier takes the place which before was occupied by the shop assistant at the counter. But in real terms, one can not speak of the same old job. The contacts with clients are de-personalized, the job tasks are automated and the sale itself is reduced to purely technical aspects. The informative, persuasive part has disappeared from the job and is now taken care of by the sales promotion personnel. The same happened with the manual aspects such as displaying, packing, etc. ...

Receiving money, however, remains a key function in the whole process. Because of this the management has increased its control of the job and reduced autonomy to an absolute minimum.

This is where scanning comes in: with the enormous amounts of products passing through the check-out, the reading of the product prices could not be left to the cashier. Nevertheless not everything is pure gain. Increased absenteeism and psychological problems (headaches, back problems, fatigue, ...) point at the need to analyze job satisfaction and ergonomy.
Job satisfaction scores low, because of the uniformity of the work and its repetitive character. Medical opinion is against asymmetric body motions, as well as environmental problems (noise, climatic conditions). The stress resulting from fear of making mistakes with money can be considerable.

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5. CHANGING CONDITIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR SKILL REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING

Valenduc and Vendramin (1991) consider the strategies that companies employ to conquer larger shares of the consumer market (association through holding companies, 'global market'-strategies, diversification, product standardization, etc.). From these strategies, they conclude that certain expected technological changes would have an impact upon the required qualifications (electronic payment, network services, etc.). Regarding the qualifications themselves, however, there is an amazing lack of available data.

Most of the recently introduced technologies tend to be of the tayloristic sort: separating conceptual functions and executing functions (functionalization), assigning separate tasks to separate persons (fragmentation), making task performance readable and controllable. Compared to the manufacturing sector, these innovations have been introduced in retailing at a late stage in history. Their impact on qualifications is complex and we shall not go into detailed descriptions here and in any case we lack sufficient data to demonstrate this point. The overall trend may be summarized as higher qualifications for a minority (mostly managers and executives) and work degradation for a majority. The case of the job of cashier (see chapter 4) gives a clear example of the latter.

A form of upgrading of qualifications – though not always wanted by the personnel – could be seen in the inclination of management to make all employees conscious of the need for market and customer-awareness. A case study carried out in 1990 on the work of employed persons (D'Hertefelt and Pollet, 1990) indicated that more and more employees are having commercial tasks added to their job (prospecting, after-sale, complaints section, ...). Especially in large companies, there's an increasing number of staff members involved in language courses, training in communication techniques, telemarketing, etc. This study was not linked, however, to one economic sector in particular and we have a strong suspicion that the retail sector (particularly SME's) are not exactly in the forefront of these developments.

6. TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

1.

6.1 The Belgian school system

On 20 June 1983 a law was passed extending the period of compulsory education up to the age of 16 (full-time) and then to the age of 18 (either full-time or part-time). Up to that date compulsory education was between the ages 6 and 14. Secondary education, in its entirety, is now part of compulsory schooling.

6.1.1 Full-time secondary education structures (OECD, 1991)

Secondary education structures have developed in a different way in the different communities. 'National' legislation (passed before the devolution of power to the communities) of 1971 (Type I) and 1957 (Type II) have recently been replaced in the Flemish community by a new decree on secondary education. Consequently, Type I or Type II schools can only be found in the French-speaking and German-speaking communities. The structure of this section thus reflects the current situation. The information given in the following sections is generally valid for the three language communities (any discrepancies are explained).

6.1.1.1 Secondary education in the French-speaking and German-speaking communities

Type I education

In accordance with the law dated July 19, 1971, Type I (reformed) secondary education is composed of three stages of two years each (see page 79: chart 1):

- 1st stage : observation;
- 2nd stage : orientation;
- 3rd stage : determination.

It is organized in four separate forms:
- general academic education;
- technical education;
- arts education;
- vocational training.

It is organized in two major study streams of channels:

- the transition stream for general academic education and part of technical education. Its main aim is to prepare pupils for higher education whilst leaving them the option of choosing to enter working life instead;

- the qualification stream, short-term at the end of the fourth year, long-term at the end of the sixth year, the main aim of which is to prepare pupils for entry into a career by obtaining a qualification certificate whilst allowing them the option of continuing their studies in higher education.

The purpose of the first stage is to provide a broad general basic education; it allows the teachers to observe pupils in order to discover their main aptitudes; in principle, the curriculum is the same for all pupils in the first year A and includes a common syllabus with compulsory 'trial' activities or optional activities, supplementary and reinforcement classes and, if necessary, extra courses for pupils who encounter difficulties.

The curriculum for the second common year consists of a common syllabus and an optional syllabus to be chosen freely by each pupil, and consisting of four or six periods (Latin, Economics, Science, Plastic Arts, Music and Technical subjects).

For those pupils who encountered difficulties in the course of their primary education and who cannot successfully complete it or cannot do so within the prescribed time limits, a modified syllabus is provided in a first year B (the so-called 'introductory year'). In the second common year, a second year of vocational training is provided with a different syllabus in which pupils are introduced to at least two vocational fields.

The first stage should enable pupils to be oriented in the most suitable way towards the different courses available in the second stage.

The second stage involves different syllabuses, both in the transitional section (general, technical or arts education), and in the qualification section (technical, arts or vocational training). The common training is reduced, whilst the optional part (single or grouped basic options, complementary options) is increased.

At the end of the second stage the following options are available:

- a proficiency or specialization year in the qualification streams (very reduced common syllabus);
- a reorientation year for pupils who wish to change to a different section in the third stage.

At the outset of the third stage pupils make their choice from the study orientations available to them. The common syllabus is reduced still further in favour of the optional part which constitutes the study orientation.

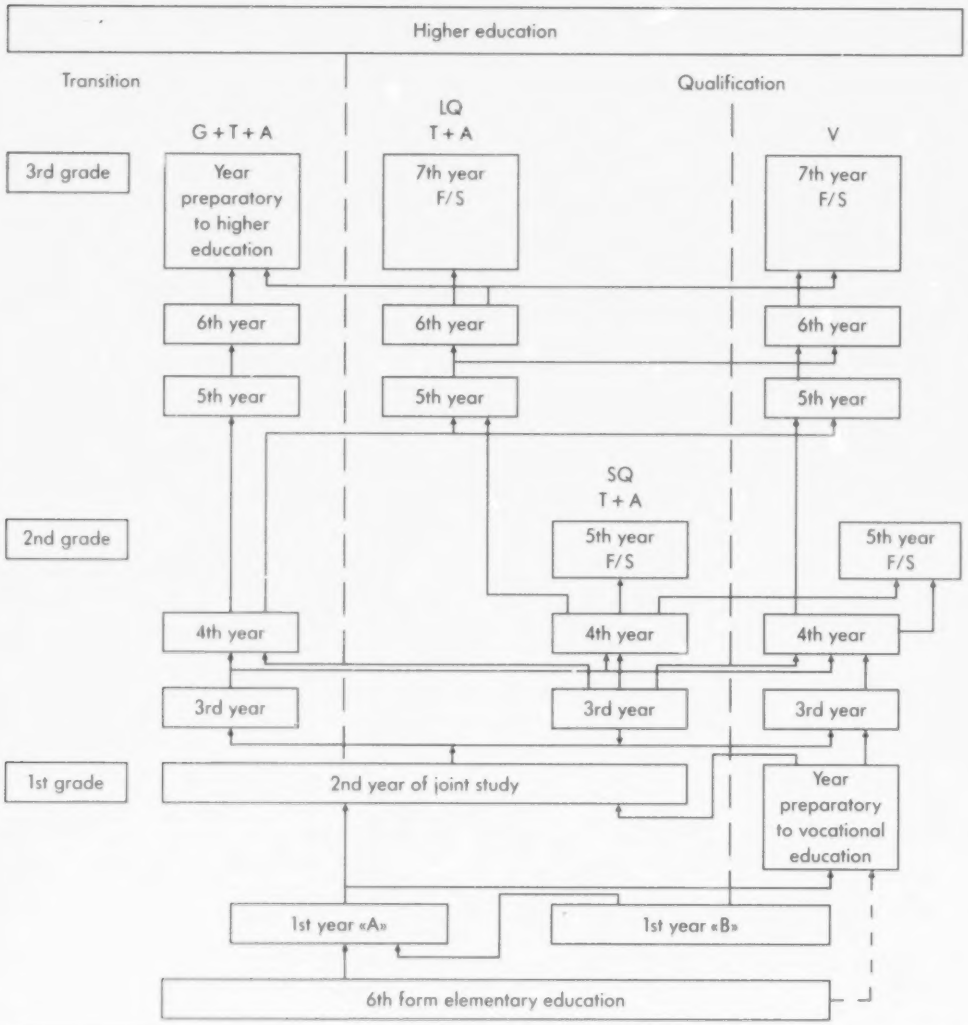
At the end of the third stage, several years are organized, such as:

- a preparatory year for pupils going on to higher education (a special year of mathematics, science, modern languages);
- proficiency or specialization years in the qualification streams;
- a year leading to a higher secondary education certificate in vocational training.

Throughout the first two stages and to a lesser extent in the third stage, there is the possibility of transferring from one form of education to another, as well as 'bridges' from vocational education to other types of education.

The structure of Type 1 (comprehensive) secondary education represents a clear move forward with regard to equal opportunities, but the number of pupils repeating a year and falling behind or abandoning their studies, as well as the number changing to another form of education following a failure may give rise to doubt as to its qualitative effectiveness; inequalities inherent in social background weigh heavily on the choice of stream and this choice is often conditioned by failure in primary education or in a form of secondary education which offers greater prospects for entering higher education or entering work in the future.

Chart 1 – Diagram of Secondary Education – Type I (Reformed Secondary Education)



G: general (academic) education (algemeen onderwijs)
T: technical education (technisch onderwijs)
A: art education (kunstonderwijs)
V: vocational education (beroepsonderwijs)
F/S: final perfecting and/or specialization year (vervolmakings- en/of specialisatiejaar)
LQ: long qualification
SQ: short qualification

Note: 1st year «A»: common 1st year
1st year «B»: special 1st year

Type II education

Type II secondary education consists of six years divided into two stages or cycles of three years each (see page 80: chart 2).

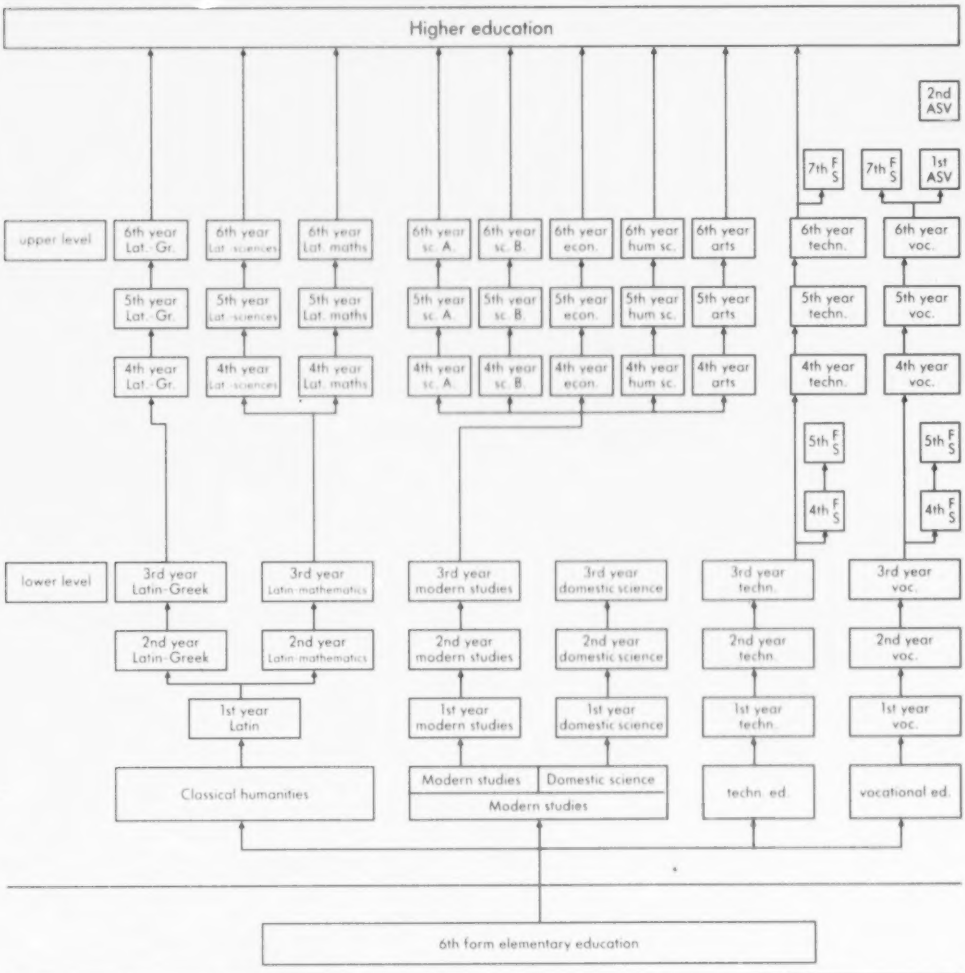
From the first year of Type II secondary education a differentiation is made between general secondary schools and technical secondary schools.

There is also a difference from the first year depending on whether or not pupils take Latin. As early as the lower cycle another differentiation is made between pupils who choose to follow Greek courses and pupils who do not.

At the beginning of the lower cycle pupils may choose between seven sections: Latin-Greek, Latin-

1.

Chart 2 - Diagram of Secondary Education – Type II



Q: qualification year (kwalificatiejaar)
F: final year (vervolmakingsjaar)
S: specialization year (specialisatiejaar).
A.S.V.: additional specialization year vocational education, various lines of study.

Owing to their great diversity, the various sides of technical and vocational education are not mentioned.

Non-State education and Provincial Council-organized education provide a Latin-mathematics side from the second year onwards.

After the 6th year there may be an additional year, preparatory to higher education.

Mathematics and Latin-Science (Classics), Scientific A or higher mathematics, Scientific B or mathematics and science, Economics and Human Sciences (modern humanities).

In technical secondary schools there is a common first year, referred to as the 'orientation year', prior to the differentiation into several study channels which occurs from the second year onwards; this first cycle, beginning after the first common orientation year, lasts three years and leads to a first qualification. Pupils who are judged to have the required ability may embark upon the higher cycle, which also lasts three years. Technical schools also provide vocational training, which has the same structure as technical education.

The structure of Type II education (with channels or streams) implies that the study streams are clearly chosen at the end of primary education and that a selection be made between pupils who wish to practise a trade and others who wish to follow training as a preparation to higher education and higher social functions; in most cases, the initial orientation determines the pupil's school career, in spite of the possibility, in theory, of changing over from one stream to another.

6.1.1.2 The new general framework for secondary education in the Flemish community

As the coexistence of two different structures in secondary education caused quite a number of complicated organizational, budgetary and psychological problems, the Flemish community decided to replace the two forms – Type I and Type II – with a new general framework for secondary education (see chart 3).

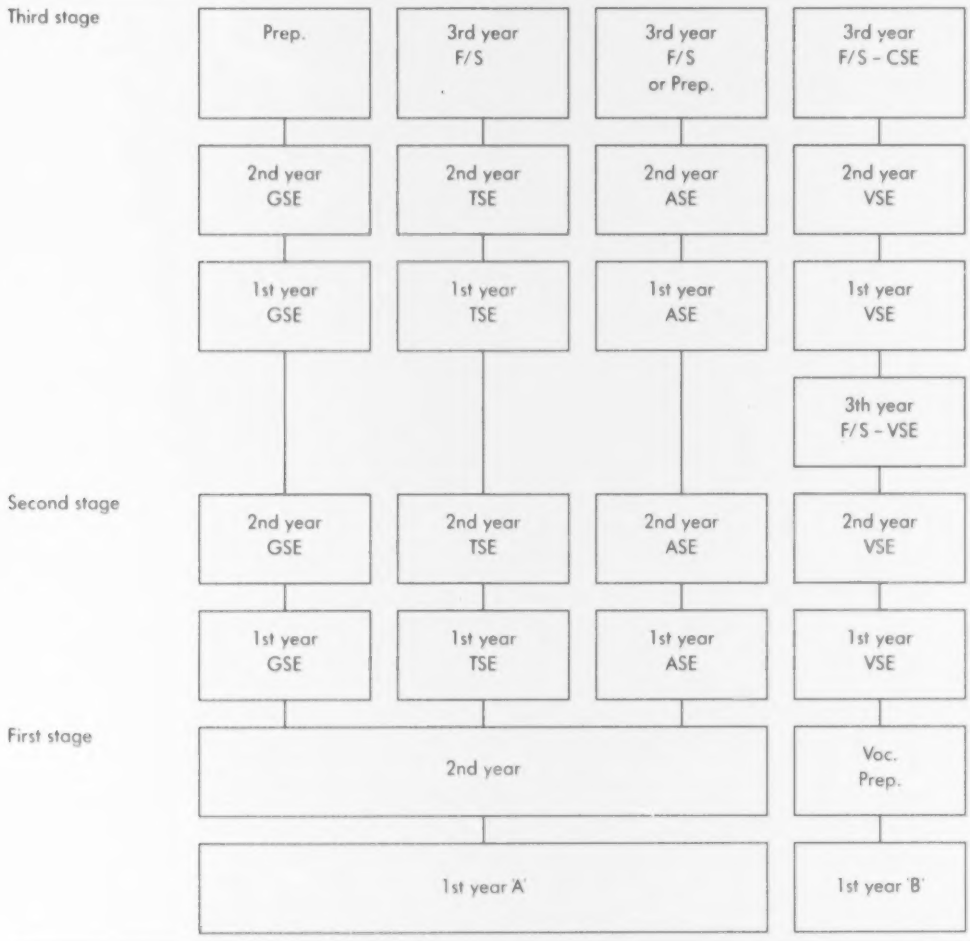
As a result of this decision, from September 1, 1989 all Flemish secondary schools adopted the new organizational form, progressively from the first year of secondary education onwards.

In accordance with the Decree dated July 31, 1990 the new framework for secondary education in the Flemish community is composed of three stages of two years each comprising four different forms:

- general academic education;
- technical education;
- arts education;
- vocational education.

Each stage consists of two years of studies and forms an unit in itself. At the end of the third stage of general academic, technical and arts secondary education, pupils may be awarded the certificate of higher secondary education and the diploma of suitability giving access to higher education. At the end of the general academic education, it is possible to take a third year of the third stage of preparation for higher education. On completion of the special third year of the third stage of vocational education, pupils may also obtain the officially recognized certificate of higher secondary education.

Chart 3 – General structure of secondary education in the Flemish community



Key: GSE, TSE, ASE and VSE: general academic, technical, art and vocational secondary education
Prep.: year preparatory to higher education
F/S: further training and/or specialization
CSE: 3rd year VSE leading to the certificate of secondary education
Voc. Prep.: year preparatory to vocational education

The possibility of taking a third year of the third stage of specialization and/or completion of training exists in technical, arts and vocational secondary education.

The four forms of education are not organized separately in the first stage. From the second stage on, the four forms are organized separately. This does not rule out the possibility of organizing a certain number of common courses. In vocational education a third year of the third stage of specialization may be organized as a short cut to entering employment.

In the first year, all pupils follow a common basic education of at least 27 periods per week consisting of the following subjects; religion or ethics, Dutch, French, mathematics, history, geography, science, arts education, technical education, physical education (English may also be included). In addition, five periods a week are left available to each school to determine as they wish within a defined and legally fixed framework. This allows the school to assert its own character as regards, for example, the tradition of the school and the socio-economic environment in which it is situated.

In the second year all pupils follow a basic course of at least 24 periods per week, consisting of the following subjects: religion or non-denominational ethics, Dutch, French, English, mathematics, history, geography, science, art education, technological education, physical education. At least 24 of 24 periods are followed by all pupils. Special arrangements exist for pupils who follow vocational education from the second year. They study the same subjects provided in the basic course, except for French and English, but do so in a separate group. Apart from the basic course, 8 to 10 periods are available for each school to develop further its individual character. In the vocation-preparing year, the basic course is limited to 16 periods. Two groups of subjects (a total of 16 periods) are added to this package. Each of these groups provides an introduction to the theory and practice of the main vocational sectors.

From the first year of the second stage up to and including the second year of the third stage, the four forms of education are organized separately, with a common and an optional package. The common part consists of the basic course; optional subjects are either fundamental (depending on further choices) or complementary.

Basic training from the first year of the second stage to the second year of the third stage consists of the following subjects: religion or non-denominational ethics, Dutch, second modern language, mathematics, history, geography, science and physical education. General academic education also includes a third modern language. In vocational education the basic training from the third up to and including the sixth year consists of the following subjects: religion or non-denominational ethics, Dutch, history and geography (the last two subjects may be replaced by an integrated social education course) and physical education.

A wide range of subjects are offered in the optional section to supplement the basic course.

Although in principle each school may emphasize certain aspects through the organization of the periods available outside the compulsory basic education programme, this presupposes that arrangements be made within the various educational networks and that common programmes be developed.

6.1.2 Part-time education

The law of June 29, 1983 relating to compulsory education provided for the creation of part-time secondary education, which is called 'reduced timetable education. The Royal Decree dated July 16, 1984 established this form of education for an experimental period of two years. With the addition of some necessary modifications, new decrees prolonged this experimental stage for the following years.

Decrees emanating from the various Community Executives will give a definite form to this type of education which, in principle, is followed by pupils under the age of 18 who are not required to follow full-time education. However, it has been extended to include young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who have signed an apprenticeship contract in industry, or a work-training agreement, and to those who, before the age of 18, were already attending a part-time education centre.

In the Flemish community, part-time vocational secondary education was given legal status in the decree dated July 30, 1990, which confirms the existing experimental structure.

Part-time secondary education is provided for 40 weeks a year with 15 weekly periods of 50 minutes (8 periods of vocational training and 7 periods of general academic education).

It is provided by Centra voor Deeltijds Onderwijs (CDO/Centres d'Enseignement à Horaire Reduit (CEHR) (Centres for Part-time Education), of which there are 48 in the Flemish community, 40 in the French-speaking community and 2 in the German-speaking community.

It is thus possible to obtain a qualification certificate equivalent to the one awarded on completion of short-term or long-term vocational education.

6.1.3 The Belgian school system and the retail sector

We cannot say that there is a proper vocational education for retailing. However, either in technical secondary education as in vocational secondary education there are departments with connections with the retail sector.

- Under technical secondary education: business and language; (specialization year, distribution).
- Under vocational secondary education: office-work, sales & showroom, clothing-retail; (specialization year) shop management.

J. Denys (1991) investigated the labour market situation of former students of some of these vocational education sections. In this survey, clothing-retail came out particulary bad, both in terms of quality of the jobs the students found (not corresponding with

education, part-time, etc.) as in the chances of finding a job at all.
From another survey (VDAB, 1991), we know that for instance sales & showroom gives a 'better perspective': only 5% remained on the unemployment-lists one year after they finished their education.

6.1.4 Practical training periods organized in companies or institutions for the benefit of pupils of the full-time secondary educational system

'Practical training periods' constitute an increasingly significant component of the curriculum in numerous sections (disciplines) within the technical and vocational secondary educational system. Especially in technical and vocational secondary education, the practical training periods are often regarded as an essential component of the educational programme and are therefore explicitly provided for in the weekly lesson schedules. However, because of the different disciplines in which they are organized, the effective implementation of these practical training periods can vary. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to achieve administrative and organizational uniformity. The advantage of such uniformity is that it promotes a general increase in quality. The administration of each school can opt either for a block system or an alternating system of practical training periods.
The block practicals are organized in a single uninterrupted period of time at one or more trainee posts inside or outside the country. The alternating practicals are organized with fixed intervals inside or outside the country. In the second and third school years of the third stage of technical and vocational secondary education, vocational training practicals are preferred. These may, for example, be preceded in the first school year of the third level of technical and vocational secondary education by participative practicals, task-oriented practicals or vocationally-oriented practicals. In the disciplines related to retail trade, the choice is often for alternating practicals with two trainee posts per year and per pupil.

6.2 Apprenticeship of young people

The provisions of the law of 29 June 1983 on the extension of compulsory education have completely reshaped the field of activity of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking continuing training institutes for the middle classes (this being the traditional designation of the self-employed). Whereas in the past an apprenticeship contract could be entered into from the age of 14 on, the new law requires all young people up to the age of 16 to attend full-time training in school. This eliminates 'potential clients' for apprenticeship aged 15-16. However, the system has become more flexible in the sense that it has become possible for young people between 16 and 18 years of age to fullfil the requirement of part-time compulsory education by signing an apprenticeship contract with an employer (practical training) while at the same time getting supplementary instruction in a training centre of the VIZO (Flemish Institute for Independent Enterprise). In principle, the 15-year-olds can also register, provided they have already followed two years of secondary education. This system of 'alternance' training has long been a traditional part of the Belgian system of vocational training (1959). It is based in fact, as in most other European countries, on the principle of training 'on-the-job' supervised by skilled workers who pass on to the apprentice their occupational know-how and 'tricks of the trade'. Employer-trainers are increasingly assisted in the training process by trainers who give technical instruction (between 72 and 124 hours per year) and general instruction (between 72 and 132 hours per year).
Thus, this amounts to a form of initial vocational training which at present lasts a maximum of four years (taking into account the temporary provisions of the law on the extension of compulsory education). Beyond the age of 18, the apprentice can either continue his of her initial training or take part in extended training.
There is still another form of apprenticeship, i.e. in occupations pursued by salaried workers (law of 19 August 1983).
It may be clear that apprenticeship can be a way for retailers to teach young people 'the tricks of the trade'. Bragard L. (1987) carried out a study on this form of education in the Walloon provinces. He studied a sample of 2200 former apprentices and found that 16.5 % of the apprenticeships took place in the retail sector and, more specific, 4.1 % of the male apprenticeships and 46.7% of the female apprenticeships. The respondents had finished their apprenticeship between 1979 and 1985. By 1987 (the moment of the interview), 16.7 % were still unemployed. Of all sectors, the retail-apprentices scored an unemployment-rate of 33 %, the highest. Thus, while young Belgians may serve an apprenticeship in order to work in the retail sector, they are not automatically guaranteed employment.
A Flemish survey (Denys, 1989), however, came up with slightly better results for the retail apprentices. Ten months after having finished their apprenticeship, only 10% were unemployed. One-third of those employed, however, were in a job that did not correspond to their education. The better Flemish results are not surprising since the unemployment situation in the French-speaking part of Belgium is much worse than in Flanders.
Finally, we should also mention management training programmes (after the period of compulsory education) that are organized by the VIZO. These are given in 40 different branches of retail trade. The certificate obtained by this means relates to business management.

6.3 Continuing training

Continuing training can be regarded as the sort of education which is not provided for in the school system and which enables the applicant to enhance his chances of finding adequate employment. Those taking part in continuing training are both working and unemployed people, the latter as long as they are readily available for the labour market.

We distinguish here between three different forms, according to their institutional context:

- social advancement courses;
- vocational training of the VDAB or FOREM;
- sectorial training initiatives (see under 6.4).

1.

6.3.1 Social advancement courses

Social advancement courses are commonly known as 'evening classes'. In the early seventies, the law on credited working hours allowed workers to attend courses organized by bodies recognized by the Ministries of Education or of Labour and Employment and to be absent from their work without suffering any loss of remuneration. The system was funded by the state (50 %) and a special social security contribution by the employers (50 %). Although promising in its early years, it did not initially attract a substantial percentage of its potential beneficiaries (nearly 10%) and by the turn of the decade, was not proving very successful. During the eighties, certain ministerial initiatives were taken to facilitate the functioning of this system ('credited working hours' was replaced by the term 'training leave') and the effects were immediate. The issue turned from 'social advancement' to 'training without employment'. By 1984, about 100,000 participants were registered, half of them following language courses. The other courses targeted mainly on 'general education'.

Table 11 - Participation social advancement courses

Level	1st year	% 2nd year	% 3rd year	% 4th year
Low vocational education	17,716	55	25	5
Low technical education	1,711	74	-	13
High vocational education	2,874	58	33	5
High technical education	7,381	49	33	6
Total[1]	29,682	55	32	6

[1] Language courses not included
Source: P. Debaty, o.c., CEDEFOP, 1987

Recent statistics for the Dutch-speaking community show the gradual dropping out of students per course level. This can perhaps be attributed to the increase of the fees.

Nevertheless, the effects in terms of restoring the chances of the low-qualified are nominal. The duration and teaching methods of qualifying courses seem to arouse a basic aversion in those people who had escaped from the regular school system as soon as they could. So one can hardly consider the 'social advancement courses' as a qualification-adjusting institution as far as low-qualified workers are concerned, not to mention the unemployed.

6.3.2 The Flemish Office for Employment and Vocational Training

These vocational training schemes employ some 1,200 trainers, spread over 60 training-centres in which more than 50 'trades' are taught or in which several new qualifications can be acquired, the word 'trade' often having lost its original meaning. These trainers may work in organized teams, in centres, or collaborate with other trainers in firms, in independent approved centres, in schools, universities, specialized centres, etc.

The training provided may be organized in various ways, and run directly or jointly (in association with firms).

In 1990, within the framework of the 0.18% legislation — which requires the sectors either to devote 0.18 % of the total wage bill to training projects for the benefit of the members of risk groups who are seeking employment, or else to contribute this amount to an employment fund — the Flemish Office for Employment and Vocational Training VDAB and the Institute for Vocational Training of the Food Sector organized 45 training programmes for sales personnel and 60 training programmes for general office staff.

These training programmes were also of indirect benefit for the retail sector in view of the close relationship between the two sectors. Also included in the training programme for sales personnel, in addition to the sales-oriented modules, were language training, specific instruction relating to food technology and a practical training period.

The training programmes for white-collar workers were organized according to the alternating system. The employment quota correspond to the employment level for comparable groups, although only a minority of the participants found a job in the sector itself.

6.4 Other continuing training forms

Recent years have seen a real proliferation of initiatives covering different forms of adult education. Quite a number of them can be classified under the denominator 'completion training for independents'. The profile of the participants following these courses tends to be rather vague, though 64 % are directors of SME's (Bragard, 1990). In another survey, 100 SME-entrepreneurs were questioned about their opinions of these courses. Only 35 % of them had attended a course at least once a year, 23 % less than once a year and 42 % had never attended even one single course. Their apparent lack of interest for these initiatives reflects the prevailing style of SME-management: short-term goals, improvisation, and a 'make do' mentality (Bragard, 1991).

As for the '0.25 %-regulation' (see section 3.2), 0.04 % was provided to finance training leave for part-time employees. There is no information, so far, as to what extent this option has been implemented.

7. ISSUES

In order to asses the exemplary character of the forthcoming case studies, we have to discern elements of heterogenity in three major domains: size, effect of innovations and the institutional framework. Disregard of those issues would risk making any comments derived from the case studies obsolete or irrelevant.

- Historically, the breakthrough of substantial capital in the trade sector and, hence, in the retail sector occurred at a late stage. Even today, we can easily recognize in the retail sector an industrial economic activity: concentration, division between manufacturing and trading, internationalization. Within this process, the SME's seem to be standing their ground even though the SME-formula is losing some of it attractiveness (hence: franchising, ...). Still, the divergence is immanent and the difference in scale has an effect in many fields of management. Training and education may be of interest in the large enterprises, the SME's on the other hand show little interest.

- A. Mok (1982) studied the introduction of microelectronics in the retail sector and its social consequences: job-impoverishment (e.g. cashiers), isolation of employees, employees becoming interchangeable and perfectly replaceable, increased management control, ergonomic problems and, most of all, a change in the demand for labour. 80% of the sales jobs are occupied by women. They are more disciplined, more eager to have part-time employment and more readily available on the labour market (so less demanding). But, while some jobs are negatively affected by innovations, others may be positively affected because of the increased level of required qualifications (languages and communication skills). In this way, training and education (in its significance and outlook) might deepen the gap between the privileged few and the large group of those who are lagging behind. One should realize that, just doing the job they do, the former gain in qualifications, while the latter do not and thus remain continuously vulnerable in their labour market position. If not tailored to natural abilities, training initiatives may enforce this discord.

- There's an increasing tendency to let any sort of sectoral policy in the field of training and education be based upon consensus between social partners. Before applauding this policy, we should be aware of the existing undercurrents. It is fair enough to advocate an education plan, incentives, coordination, greater access to the training market ... but what if the donkey does not bite the carrot ? At the company level, especially in SME's, the social partners have very little say in any matters of importance. There is no doubt that matters such as innovation and education are decided informally, with short-term pay-back periods always a priority consideration. Money talks, the trainer walks.

PART 2:

Case study "INCOBE"

Case study "X"

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CASE STUDY "INCOBÉ"

2.

1. Introduction

1.1 The selection of this case

The Incobé case (which should correctly be called 'Incobé – Van de Meeren case') may be considered a special case. It was originally understood that three types of case studies would prove valid on the subject. The main type would focus on CVE (continuing vocational education) provided by a company for its personnel. This company would comprehend a proper training policy and constitute an example in this domain. A second type is a variation on the first in the sense that a corporation supplies CVE for its plants. Both types more or less exclude the smaller companies from selection, which evidently limits the exemplary character of the cases studied to medium-sized or large companies.
Here, however, we have a case that proves specifically interesting for small shops and companies and responds to the third type of cases that could be worked out. The interesting part lies in the formula rather than in the content of the CVE offered. The formula is as follows. An external training body (in this case Incobé) develops training programmes for a group of companies. These companies, all of them shareholders of Incobé, then decide which programme will be offered (and also when, where, etc.). An important feature of the formula is that all companies belong to the same retailing subsector (in this case furniture). This makes the training programme very product-related, which in turn overcomes the widely-voiced criticism that CVE is far too general for small shops to justify its costs both in fees and lost man-hours.
This formula seems to be unique in Belgium and certainly allows us to draw conclusions on the basis of a model in which small shops can play a major part.

An even more basic reason for selecting this case lies in the fact that CVE in small shops (with emphasis on its permanent character) normally seems an uphill battle, whereas here we have an exception to this rule and therefore the proof that it can be done.

1.2 The information sources

To complete the case study it was necessary to gather information from two sides.

- The training provider, which, as stated above is Incobé, an external body and a company in its own right, offering not only training programmes but other services as well. At Incobé we interviewed one person with managerial status.

- The training consumer, namely the company BVBA Van de Meeren; this company is one of the 160 or so members shareholders of Incobé. Since it is a very small shop, we were granted just one interview with the general manager. This person had followed some of the training programmes together with his staff and was well placed to give us the information required. Unfortunately, the staff themselves could not be made available to endorse the answers given by their superior.

The names and functions of the persons we spoke with are attached to the end of this report.

1.3 The structure of this report

In order to avoid the necessity of telling the same story twice, we thought it useful to begin with the supply-side of the training, before going into detail on participation, reception and evaluation.
In section 2 we give a brief profile of Incobé, their activities and their target market. Section 3 focuses largely on the training-formula they offer: the idea, the process and the way it is generally received.
A description of Van de Meeren, one of the companies receiving the training, is the subject of section 4. Section 5 describes how the training programme was received by the personnel of Van de Meeren. Finally we devote the last section to the evaluation and future prospects of this training formula, both from the perspective of the provider and that of the participant.

2. Incobé: the background

2.1 History and activities

2.1.1 Ownership and location

Incobé NV acts as a limited corporation with shareholders. Its sole establishment is located in the community of Kapellen, in the large conurbation of Antwerp. Incobé employs 56 people and, strictly speaking, falls under the 'services to companies' sector.
It is important to state that the shareholders of Incobé are also their clients. These tend to be long-term clients who commission Incobé for a whole range of services.

2.1.2 History

Founded in the late 1950's as a buyers' combine by a group of independent retailers, the original idea of Incobé was to withstand the purchasing power of the large distributors[1] which were emerging at that time. The buyers' combine proved relatively successful and was able to hold out well into the eighties. Then it was realized that putting together product ranges and negotiating price deals would simply not be sufficient to withstand the winds of change which were blowing through the retail sector. Quantity-based strength, it was recognized, would be weak strength when competition became tougher. The accent shifted from a buyers' combine towards providing services to companies.

2.1.3 Activities

The activities can be classified into four groups, which together comprise a logical sequence of services:

- buying goods in large quantities for clients (independent furniture retailers) which obviously produces a saving in costs;

- launching and conducting publicity campaigns for clients;

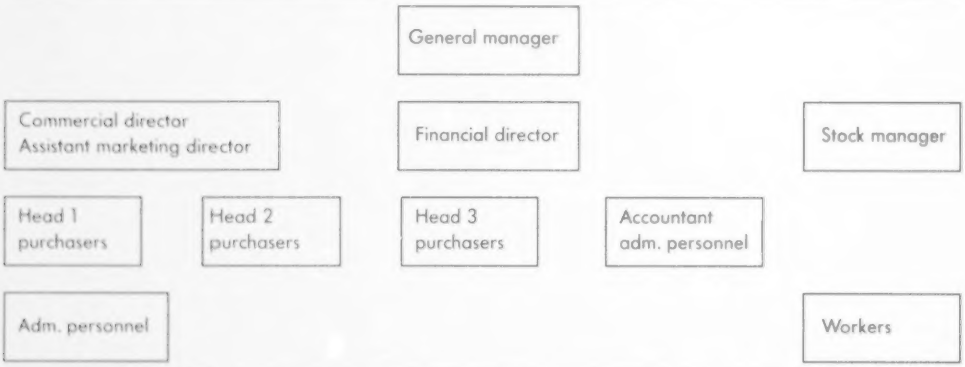
[1] See p. 2 of the Belgian sector report (Pollet I., Employment, work and training in Belgian retailing, Leuven: HIVA, 1992) where we explained the impact of the abolition of the 'Grendelwet' (barring act) in 1961.

- advice on interior design of shops and showrooms;

- education and training of sales personnel and other staff who come into contact with customers in the course of their duties; the idea is that customers are becoming ever more demanding.

2.1.4 Personnel

Job classification
The organizational chart looks as follows:



Those written in italics have executive status. The personnel management comes under the domain of the General Manager. We see that the commercial management (which is the key element) is divided into groups according to the clients (see 2.2).

- Educational classification: executives and group heads are all university graduates; purchasers usually have higher education diplomas (but only a few of them from university); administration personnel (secretarial and reception work) have vocational secondary education qualifications.

- Contract and status: 4 executives, 47 administrative staff and 5 workers; total 56 employees.

2.2 Clients

The clientele consists of 160 furniture retailers, grouped as follows:

- a number of stores selling 'Europameubel' furniture;

- a number of stores selling 'Sleepy' furniture;

- a number of independent stores (furniture, curtains, wallpaper and carpets).

The first two groups we mentioned are not true chains but they can use the logo 'dealer in ....'. As far as ownership and capital is concerned, all shops are independent.
They all sell consumer goods to households.

2.3 Background and valorization of the training: the consumer's market

The eagerness of clients to train their staff can be explained by the change in the market-share they are targeting, taking into account the altered make-up of the consumers'market.
The income pyramid is tending to shift. The old pyramid consisted of a small top, a large centre and a large base. The independent furniture retailers primarily operated in the centre section (80% of the market).
But the new income-distribution structure (no longer a pyramid) appears top-heavy, with a shrinking centre. A dual society seems to be emerging.
The continuously growing 'new top' is populated mainly by the 'old rich', 'new affluent' and 'double-income households'. New affluent are those who have paid their mortgage and find themselves at the peak of their career; with their children having left home, they are at their spending maximum (high incomes and reduced costs); being 'children of the baby boom', their numbers are still rising. The 'new bottom' consists mainly of the traditional low incomes, poor pensioners and a category of 'new poor': irregular careers, interrupted careers, part-time and temporary employment.
The newly developing target group of the market comprises both the reduced centre and the lower two-thirds of the top. Since the bottom section are supposedly interested in cheap products, independent stores will never be able to compete with department stores, supermarkets and large distributors for that share of the market. The well-off and the rich, on the contrary, demand the sort of service only specialized shops can offer.

3. Incobé: training programmes

3.1 Idea

The supply of training comes down to 4 programmes: a. salesmanship and selling techniques, b. reception, c. installation and d. guidance of salespeople for managers (we will refer to these further as a.b.c.d.). The programmes are closely linked with main corporate issues. The hardcore of each programme is the whole of attitudes and techniques associated with what is called a customer-oriented approach. The thread is that not only salespeople and shop assistants (a.) interact with customers but

that receptionists-telephonists and installers do so as well (b., c.). Managers have to be aware of the bottom line of each program in order to reactivate their personnel whenever the acquired attitudes seem to be fading (d.). The background is that, since the target-group among customers is changing, it is necessary to raise the qualifications of sales personnel in order to meet ever-increasing demands with respect to information, after-sales service, etc.

3.2 Methods

The basics of the methods used could be set out as follows:

- the training is product-oriented; all participants work in the same subsector (household furniture) and sell the same types of products. This having been said, we can hardly speak of product-training (as is usually provided by the manufacturer) since the emphasis is on selling; it is easy to see that the training kills two birds with one stone: selling goods and knowledge of products;

- the emphasis is very much on training, less so on education or theory; 'how to do it' is the central question; day-to-day situations fill up most of the time (how to react when a customer says this, asks that, doesn't say anything, etc.);

- the manual used takes the form of programmed instruction rather than a textbook; full of do's and don'ts, it is constructed to make quick reference invitingly easy;

- the training uses video recording to allow the trainees to understand their own behaviour while enacting a sale situation; this type of feedback allows them to correct themselves in a non-threatening atmosphere;

- another idea is to make people as bilingual as possible; training-sessions are offered either in French or in Dutch, with people (particulary a and d) pressed to attend both;

- the sessions are residential and are held in a relatively remote part of the country; there is nothing much to do except hang around in an empty lounge; people are supposed to attend the full program (for a and d: 2 days of 10 hours each; for b and c: 1 day);

- at the end of a session, there is no test or check whatsoever as the proof of the pudding is in the eating; participants are, however, asked to fill in an evaluation sheet to comment on the quality and applicability of the training;

- while the sessions might be the essence, what comes after is equally important; first there are the refresher files, 4 of which are sent to participants during the 6 months following the session; thereafter there is a repeat session (What did you try out ? How was it ? What went wrong ?, etc.) and theme days (themes such as 'special clients', 'special techniques', new products, sale on request, etc.); all this contributes to the permanent character of the training.

3.3 Sessions and participants

What, where and when sessions will be held, is decided in the annual meeting between Incobé and its shareholders, who have a considerable say in the programme. Attendance since the start of training sessions (1989) can be broken down as follows:

a. salesmanship: attended by 170 sales staff so far as it is described above; special sessions have been held for the 2 'big' groups (Europameubel and Sleepy) who both aim to project a distinct philosophy; participants were men and women and belonging to all age categories;

b. reception: attended by 40 receptionists, a predominantly female public; the main topic here is how to make best use of the telephone; the course lasts one day;

c. installation: attended by about 20 installers, all men; here, the idea is to instil a commercial attitude in people who normally would not bother to think about this; this course is the most practical of the programme (how to present oneself, how to speak while demonstrating, etc.);

d. guidance of salespeople for managers: employees tend to thrive on the know-how they have picked up during training sessions but enthusiasm might diminish afterwards; it is up to the general manager to monitor closely whether employees remain inclined to put into practice what they have learned.

3.4 Budget and costs

The registration cost for one session is 4,500 Bfrs per participant in the case of b and c (one-day sessions), or 15,000 Bfrs per participant in the case of a and d (two-day sessions).

This income from registration is sufficient to cover the costs of the sessions themselves. The preparatory costs (drawing up the courses, etc.) are part of the general costs that are paid by the member companies on the basis of monthly contributions (varying between 2,500 and 9,000 Bfrs per month, depending on their turnover) for the different services offered.
Thus Incobé's annual training budget amounts to 500,000 Bfrs.

3.5 Future prospects

A similar cluster of programmes for home furnishing retailers is in preparation.

4. Van de Meeren: general description

4.1 Major facts and history

The BVBA Van de Meeren is a large independent furniture store. This means its activity is mainly, not to say exclusively the buying, stocking and selling of furniture. Its customers are the direct consumers, households. The furniture is supplied basically by the Europameubel chain.

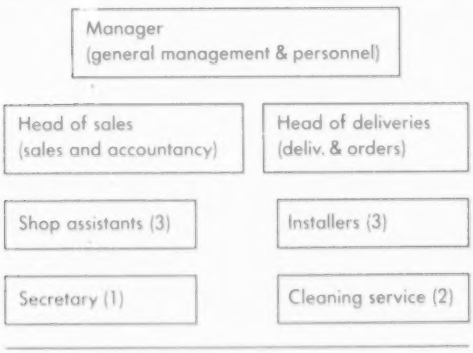
The firm was founded in 1977 as a family company and expanded its surface area substantially in 1988, when it became a BVBA (a 'limited' company).

2.

The turnover in 1991 was about 100 million Bfrs, a rise of 20% compared with the previous year. The future looks relatively promising, since the buyers' combine formula provides an inherent competitive advantage. Beside this, sale on request[2] seems to be growing in importance. The location, right in the westernmost corner of Belgium (traditionally an economic backwater) is set for favourable development in the near future. The prospect of 'Europe 1993' makes the nearby Pas-de-Calais Department (France) a potentially viable outlet and the opening of the Channel tunnel will bring one of Europe's new traffic arteries almost to the back door (Calais-Brussels).

4.2 Human resources

4.2.1 Organizational chart and functions



The family-based organization has a father (manager) at the top, working with his two sons (head of sales and head of deliveries). The two sons have an 'auxilliary' contract (which makes them basically self-employed).
The shop assistants (all 3 of them female) generally work inside the showroom (selling goods to customers), while the 3 installers usually work outdoors (demonstrating or delivering furniture). The cleaning women work on a parttime basis.
All in all we are dealing with a very small firm (strictly speaking 9 employees since the manager and his family are not counted as personnel).

4.2.2 Personnel

- Gender: 5 women, 4 men.
- Age: all between 25 and 30 except one saleswoman who is over 50.
- Contracts: 6 have a clerk's contract (two of which are part-time), while 3 have a worker's contract.
- Qualifications: two of the three installers have diplomas of Technical Secondary Education; the third one (newly recruited) has a secretarial diploma but also experience as a stock manager (computerized stock control will be this person's task now). Two of the shop assistants started working after their General Secondary Education, while the other has a diploma of Higher Education (Distribution certificate). The secretary used to study in short-term education as a pharmacy assistant. The cleaning women have no qualifications. The two sons of the manager studied marketing (higher educ. non-univ.).
- Evolution: 1980: 2 installers and 1 part-time cleaning woman; the selling was done by the manager and his wife (personnel: 3);
  1985: + 1 shop assistant (personnel: 4);
  1990: + 2 shop assistants; + 1 section head (son); + 1 cleaning woman (personnel: 7);
  1991: + 1 installer; + 1 secretary; + 1 section head (son) (personnel: 9).

Currently one of the installers is being dismissed and replaced by a new employee. The dismissal was due to 'stubbornness in working methods, not growing with the firm, no cooperativeness in spite of being 15 years in the company' (quoting the manager).

4.2.3 Terms of employment

As a rule the clerks work 40 hours (6-day week); the workers work 37.20 hours (5-day week). There is some flexibility in the way these time schedules are filled in. The pattern hereby is, of course, dictated by the shop opening hours, which are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (weekdays and Saturdays) and between 2 and 5 p.m. (Sundays). The Sunday opening is permitted for furniture shops not based in city centres.
Wages are paid on an hourly basis (workers) or as monthly salary (clerks) according to the collective sector agreements. Specifically, the saleswomen get the minimum rate, topped up by commission and, at times, a premium. The latter comes in especially to keep motivation high during the off-season months.

4.2.4 Qualifications

Neither diplomas nor certificates were asked for when personnel were recruited. Experience is an asset, though not essential. 'Team spirit' is the most important qualification (according to the manager). Promotion possibilities might appear if the current growth rate is sustained. This would mean that shop assistants could take up more responsibilities, give guidance to freshly recruited personnel, etc.

4.2.5 Local labour market situation

The 1990 unemployment percentage[3] for the Veurne/Furnes-area (part of the province of West Flanders) goes into double figures. The level of 10.6% of the active population unemployed (8.5% male population, 13.5% female population) scores just under the national average (11.9%), but well over the West Flanders average (6.9%). West Flanders, in fact, has the lowest unemployment rate of Belgium and tends to attract labour forces from

[2] Mentioned in the sector report as one of the new forms of distribution (p. 71).
[3] Source: RIZIV, Employment statistics, Brussels 1991.

other areas. The downward trend of the Veurne/ Furnes unemployment figure (still over 18% in 1987) is partly due to this sort of internal migration. It should be noted that some of the unemployment in Veurne/ Furnes and the coastal area is seasonal. Considerable numbers of people work in the tourist industry and, as is generally known, are not always officially registered.

5. Van de Meeren: training programmes followed by personnel

Prior to 1989 the manager had attended just one salesmanship training course (as a Social Advancement Course). The training had a general character and did not seem to provide practical benefits. From 1989 onwards all training of Van de Meeren personnel was included in Incobé programmes, of which 3 types were attended: salesmanship and selling techniques, installation and guidance of salespeople for managers (details of these courses are summed up extensively in section 3).

- Salesmanship and selling techniques: This course has been attended six times: by the manager and his two sons, and by the two junior shop assistants, one of whom followed the course twice (in French and in Dutch). The French version is of interest with the huge potential of French customers so nearby.

- Installation: The installation course has been attended three times: by one of the sons (head of deliveries) and by two installers. Guidance of salespeople by managers: attended by the manager and one of the sons (head of sales).

This means that, strictly speaking, 4 employees have followed one of the Incobé courses. They were more or less pushed to do sc, though the training time was counted as working hours. According to the manager, the skills acquired quickly became visible in the turnover and are thought to be one of the key factors in the prosperous period the company is enjoying.

There is no way we could discover any 'participation of social partners in the training policy' for in and around the company social partners are nowhere to be seen. Being a small firm, there's no trade union presence and union membership remains an individual matter. Moreover, the region (where agriculture was the major source of income until well into the seventies) happens to have one of the lowest levels of union membership.

The reason to shift from Social Advancement Courses to the Incobé system was clearly to be situated in the specific subsector-oriented character of the latter. Van de Meeren was already linked with Incobé through other contracts and activities (buyers'combine, publicity campaigns and interior design).

6. Evaluation and transferability

6.1 Evaluation

- The two persons interviewed had nothing but praise for both the formula and its implementation. Unfortunately we were not given the opportunity to sound out the staff about this.

- One reservation we have concerns some doubt about the educative character of the programmes. They are seen basically as training, not as education, and provide skills which seem applicable only in the same subsector (indeed the programmes are promoted this way). One realizes that the programmes are offered to employers in order to let their employees attend them.

- The positive side – and the reason this case has been selected – is that the formula allows small and independent shops to enable their personnel to acquire new qualifications and skills on a permanent base. There is normally no scope for such things in companies of this size.

6.2 Transferability

One could say that both the formula and the programmes cannot be copied but they can be imitated. This means that a different subsector with other types of products would require a new programme to be worked out. But the formula and the main didactical approach would not have to be altered. The bottom line is that a common interest by a group of retailers from the same subsector must exist. Since the programmes target the better-off income groups, they seem particulary suited to the more upmarket type of products where the acquisition of skills is well worth the investment.

Situating the programmes in a broader perspective, we assume they fill a gap in the market. The intermediary systems (Social Advancement Courses; Public Service of Employment Exchange and Vocational Training; Completion Training for Independents) are not in a position that they can offer the most direct applicable types of training. Large companies (cf. the other Flemish case) find it worthwhile to organize this themselves but SME's definitely face a problem here. The formula described in this case allows SME's to acquire skills featuring a direct applicability while remaining payable.

CASE STUDY "X"

2.

1. Profile of company X

1.1 General description

1.1.1 Short history of group X

Company X was founded in 1867. In 1957, in a period which saw a high point in consumption, the company opened the first self-service supermarket in Belgium. In subsequent years these self-service stores sprang up everywhere, with around 8 or 10 shops being opened each year.

The start of the 1970s was a turning point for the company. The government introduced the 'Small Shopkeepers Protection Act', which regulated the opening of supermarkets. The reaction of company X was twofold. On the one hand the company decided to move into the US, where it currently operates some 800 stores; on the other, it decided to diversify. A store chain was opened in the non-food sector, offering personal care and hygiene products; there are currently 58 shops in this chain in Belgium. In addition to the chemist's and perfumery shops, a number of 'hard discounts' were also opened, which operated with a smaller area and so circumvented the law on expansion. In 1990 the group had around 50 'hard discounts'.

At the start of the 1980s, the group had reached the legally permitted maximum of the number of shops it could open in Belgium. In 1981 it was decided to start up a chain of 'affiliates', to be run by independent operators, with company X acting as the 'wholesaler' and as a 'partner', supplying products to the affiliates and offering support in day-to-day management. More than 164 shops were opened under this scheme. In 1987 the company acquired 40% of a Portuguese food distribution company, which now has 31 sales outlets. In the domestic Belgian market, a chain of stores is being started which offers pet supplies. In addition, the first move will shortly be made into Czechoslovakia.

Table 1 - Group X companies

Group X companies	Number of locations
Belgium	
Supermarkets	106
Affiliates	164
Hard discounts	50
Personal care shops	58
USA	786
Portugal	31

Net profit for the group as a whole amounted to 3,771,000,000 Bfrs in 1990 (inclusive of VAT). The number of sales outlets increased to 1,195. The table below contains market information relating to the group.

1.1.2 A few market details on company X

This case study focuses on the supermarket chain, which addresses the food distribution sector, and which has had a presence in Belgium since 1867. We opted for this store chain because this is still the largest activity of the group, at least as far as the Belgian situation is concerned.
The selection of this supermarket chain is related to the image of company X at the level of training, in that it is regarded as a 'spearhead company' in the Belgian distribution sector.

Table 2 - Market details of the group

	1990	Difference compared to 1989
Sales[1]	266,172	+ 2.4%
Net profit[1]	3,771	+ 17.5%
Shareholders' equity[1]	14,047	+ 11.5%
Number of sales outlets	1,195	+ 12.6%
Number of employees	62,500	+ 13.6%

[1] In Bfrs millions

There are 106 sales outlets in the supermarket chain in Belgium, selling exclusively to private individuals. Sales amounted to 65.26 billion Bfrs in 1990, while investments for the same year totalled 1.5 billion Bfrs.

The chain sells a wide range of products: fruit and vegetables, dairy produce, groceries, chemist's products, perfumery, drinks, freezer products, bread and confectionery, fresh meat, fish, delicatessen and non-food products. The turnover per department is as follows: 53% for groceries, chemist's products, perfumery, drinks, freezer products, bread and confectionery; 19% for fresh meat, delicatessen and fish; 13% for dairy produce; 9% for fruit and vegetables; 6% for non-food products.

1.1.3 Structure of company X

The production line of the company is as follows. The customer goes to the sales outlets; these are supplied by the transport services, which collect their products from the distribution centres. The final link in the chain is formed by a number of logistics services which take responsibility for a sound purchasing policy, management of the warehouses, organization of transport, and support at the level of information technology, advertising, accounting and personnel.

Table 3 - Support services of company X

Purchase	Transport	Advertising
Product school	Supermarkets	Laboratories
Staff	Information technology	Marketing
Distribution		

Three major hierarchical stages can be distinguished with respect to the sales outlets. A member of the management committee supervises the activities of two zone directors; the northern zone and the southern zone. Each zone director is in charge of six district managers, each of whom in turn monitor the activities of around 53 supermarket managers.

Table 4 - Hierarchical structure of the supermarkets

member of management, responsible for supermarkets
zone directors (North and South)
district managers (12)
supermarket managers (106)

1.2 Human resources

1.2.1 Employment[1]

As shown in the table below, employment in the group increased between 1980 and 1990. This growth can be explained among other things by the systematic takeover of stands in supermarkets which had previously been contracted out, by expansion of the chemist's and perfumery chains, by enlarging some supermarkets, by the strong increase in the number of people interrupting their careers and by the increase in sales.

Table 5 - Evolution of staff in the Belgian group

Year	Number of employees	Difference
1980	9,333	-
1985	9,798	+ 465
1990	11,411	+ 1,613

In 1990 51% of the employees worked part-time[2]. More than 60 % of the workforce are women and 49 % full-time[2]. In terms of job category, the number of white-collar workers is striking: 84 % of the workforce are white-collar workers, 3% are employed at management level and 13 % are manual workers. Around 79 % of the workforce are involved in sales, with 21 % being employed in administration, transport or storage. The age structure of the workforce is very young: 9 % are younger than 20.41 % between 21 and 30 years old, 28% between 31 and 40.15 % between 41 and 50 and 7 % over 51. Staff turnover is very high at 16 %.

1.2.2 Terms of employment

Staff work a 36-hour week (4 x 8 hours and 1 x 4 hours). The supermarkets are open every day (except Sunday) from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and until 9 p.m. on Friday. Pay is expressed as a fixed hourly or monthly pay; a premium system is employed only in the warehouses. Payment of wages is agreed, and pay scales are noted in the pay structure. The total wages bill amounted to 10 billion Bfrs in 1990. Employee's travel costs are subsidized. In addition, the warehouses and administrative centres have a canteen where hot meals can be obtained.

1.2.3 Job allocation

Middle management-level employees in the administrative centres must as a minimum possess a diploma of higher education. No specific educational requirements are set for supermarket staff. As a rule, the level of education is very low. The qualities which are considered important can be placed under the denominator 'social and communicative skills'[3].

There is currently a recruiting problem for manual staff in the supermarket, both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. From a quantitative point of view, there are few applicants, since the distribution sector has a poor image amongst young people. In particular, the rules governing working hours frighten them off. In the eyes of the employer, there is also a qualitative problem: applicants do not always meet the requirements, with in particular, their motivation and attitude, sometimes forming a stumbling block.

As far as opportunities for promotion are concerned, employees in the supermarket begin as check-out assistants and shelf stackers and can move up to become 'head of department'. Promotion to assistant manager or manager is possible, although external recruiting is also used to fill these positions. The under-representation of women in positions of responsibility is striking. There are only 25 women at management level in the group, compared with 325 men. At the level of the supermarkets, there are 106 supermarket managers, of whom only one is female. A positive plan of action within the company has still not been initiated, although a think tank was set up last year, in which managers met to consider the future of the company and the sector. This think tank focused attention on the position of women in the company and formulated a number of recommendations designed to increase the representation of women at management level. The key words which come to the fore in this connection are promotion and recruiting of female employees. The management will shortly decide whether the idea of positive action will be implemented in the company.

2. Training programmes at company X

2.1 Structure and policy

Company X has its own training department (see table). The training manager is responsible for the organization of training within the group. Group training programmes are usually started at the request of one or more members of the management. After noting the demand, the training manager goes in search of the right formula. The budgeting of these training programmes, which are usually set up on a permanent basis, is also the responsibility of the training manager.

[1] These employment figures relate to the Belgian Group, which means that they include not only the supermarket chains, but also the affiliates, chemist's/ perfumeries, etc. The supermarket chain accounts for approximately 75 % of the total workforce.

[2] Unfortunately we have no figures which shed light on the distribution of part-time working amongst men and women. Equally, there is no distribution according to sex in the classification of positions within the company. Other figures which are lacking include distribution according to contract structure and nationality.

[3] No figures are available relating to the education level of the staff. A start will be made on changing this situation in 1992, by entering all existing figures into a computer.

2.

In addition to group training programmes, investments are also made in individual training schemes; for example, a member of the personnel department may take part in the 'human resources' seminar. In this case, it is the head of the personnel department who decides on participation and who at the same time prepares the budget for the training course. In other words, each member of the middle management decides independently on the relevance and financial cost of an individual training course. These courses mostly arise as a result of 'ad hoc' situations. The flipside of the coin is that, as a result of the decentralization of the individual training initiatives, an overview of the scale and content of the supply of training courses is lost.
Unfortunately, no figures are available, either relating to the individual training courses or the group training programmes, which give an idea of the number of participants and the overall cost of these initiatives. In other words, the supply of training courses is not evaluated in terms of its economic costs.

Table 6 – Situation of the training department in the company

Personnel department	
Industrial medicine	Labour relations
Training	Pay
Management of recruits	Social

One noteworthy fact concerns the setting up in 1990 of a 'product school', which concentrates on group training programmes during which participants are able to become better acquainted with the products. At the head of this product school is a coordinator who takes charge of the organizational aspects such as drafting plans, setting the agenda, sending out invitations, etc. Training courses are provided chiefly by the purchasing department, with experts sometimes being solicited from suppliers. Recently, for example, a dietician was invited to give an explanatory talk on the cholesterol content of margarine. External experts are also invited who are not connected with any of the suppliers. In 1990 this school provided training for some 1,200 departmental heads, and 1,700 participants are expected in 1992.

What are the aims of the product school? Three objectives are defined. Above all, the aim is to motivate the departmental heads in the supermarkets. Consumers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about food products, and the departmental heads, if they wish to provide a good service, must possess knowledge which is greater than that of the consumer, to enable them to answer all questions from the consumer without hesitation. On the other hand, this dissemination of product knowledge is also a form of internal marketing. The departmental heads are, in a manner of speaking, the first customers. If they give a product a positive assessment, there is a greater chance that the product will sell well. Finally, the aim is to create synergy between the sales and purchasing departments. In other words, the intention is to give the departmental heads an introduction to purchasing policy and, at a human level, to achieve an improvement in communication.
It is clear that this product school is a response to the idea of permanent training. We would underline the unique nature of this initiative, which makes maximum use of internal expertise within a structured system.
More than 80% of the training courses were provided internally in 1991; of these, 60% were provided by the product school. 20% of the courses were based on the help of external experts; in concrete terms, five specialist consultancies were used. Occasionally government officials were also invited; for example, a number of inspectors from the Ministry of Economic Affairs were invited to explain the implications of a new law.
For all internal training courses, the group has a fully equipped room at its disposal, with Barcovision, video equipment, an overhead projector and an adjacent tasting-room.
The budgeting is done not by the training office, but by the profit units (supermarkets). The budget item called 'investing in personnel' contains only the real costs and not the lost working hours. For the whole group the product school costs 15 million Bfrs annually (for the amount per supermarket, thus, to be divided by 106). To estimate the total training budget, we should assume that the product school represents 60 to 70% of this total.

2.2 Current situation

2.2.1 Evolution

Since 1985 there has been a clear increase in the efforts made on the level of training[4]. A striking example of this is the founding of the product school.
In addition, new target groups are constantly being addressed by the supply of training programmes: not only the supermarket staff, but also the manual workers in the warehouses are invited to take part. Recently an attempt has been made to put together less homogeneous participant groups; in this way it is hoped to stimulate a more informal communication network within the company.
On a didactic level, audio-visual material is being used to an increasing extent. The methods employed by the product school are fairly innovative, making use of product exhibitions and tasting sessions.

The range of training courses offered has evolved in recent years. In 1980, the emphasis was placed primarily on communication techniques and forms of management. Through the 1980s the accent shifted to information technology, safety and hygiene, while from 1990 onwards, product knowledge began to receive a good deal of attention. This was due on the one hand to the fact that the client is perceived as having become more critical, while on the other hand the product range has been greatly expanded.

[4] No figures are available on this topic.

2.2.2 Range of training courses

The training policy at company X is built around three main themes, technical and professional skills, product knowledge and quality of attitude.

Both group and individual training courses are followed during working hours. Although courses are not compulsory, there is a degree of social and moral pressure which undoubtedly ensures that all participants belonging to a target group are reached. The training department defines the target group for each group training programme; as regards participation in individual training programmes, each member of the management decides independently whether to attend.

There is no direct relationship between a given series of courses and promotion, although non-participation may be seen as 'writing on the wall'.

There is a large and varied range of courses on offer. In principle, all departments are involved in the training initiatives, and both the employees at the sales outlets and administrative employees and manual workers in the warehouses are eligible to take part. The greatest range of courses appears to cater for sales staff. We shall summarize a few of the initiatives here, focusing primarily on permanent training programmes.

The share taken by individual training courses is greatest among middle management. Group training programmes are also provided, however, and a course is shortly to be set up under the title 'Management of malfunctions in the company'. External experts will be brought in for this course. In this group of training courses, the emphasis lies more on situational training sessions.

The manual workers in the warehouses take part almost exclusively in training courses with an 'ad hoc' character. Recently, for example, the manual workers were the target group for a new training programme dealing with performance reviews, for which external experts will be approached.

Since more than 80% of the workforce is employed in sales, we shall take a longer look at the range of training courses for this group. Each sales outlet can be subdivided into managers (and assistant managers), the heads of departments and the shop staff. On average, a supermarket has nine departmental heads. The departments which are distinguished are the butchery department, food, fruit and vegetables, dairy, wine, reception, check-outs, non-food. The shop staff consists of shelf-stackers 3A, check-out assistants 3B and shelf-stackers 3C; the latter category stack the shelves without unloading the lorries. The training programmes on offer concentrate on two target groups, namely supermarket managers and departmental heads (or supervisors). Little training is given to shop assistants.

The supermarket manager is responsible for three aspects of the supermarket, namely the social, commercial and infrastructural aspects. Permanent group training programmes are organized by the training department to support the management of these various aspects.

On a social level, every manager is given training in 'social legislation' to enable him to answer questions from staff; this course lasts five days. Since managers are also responsible for staff selection, they receive a one-day introduction to 'interview and selection techniques'.

The commercial training programmes focus on customer and product knowledge. Examples of such courses include 'Reception of the customer' (one day) and Micro-marketing' (one day).

Support for the infrastructural responsibility is provided by means of an induction course in 'Ergonomics' (one day) and in 'Safety and hygiene' (one day).

Since a supermarket manager controls his own budget and is obliged to achieve a given business figure, he receives a one day's training in 'Account management'. In addition to these group training courses, it is also possible to take part in individual programmes.

Departmental heads receive permanent product training. This is provided by the product school and takes up an average of three days each year.

Shop assistants receive no permanent training, the formal training provided being limited to 'ad hoc' training courses. For example, the check-out assistants were last year invited to a seminar entitled 'Reception of the customer'. They were also given training in 1990 following the introduction of OCR systems at the check-outs. This was a one-off training session, as new check-out staff are trained by their colleagues.

Thus needs detection for training is not done on the basis of systematic inquiry. The impulse is given, on the one hand, by the supply. On the other hand, each plant manger is responsible for sending out his personnel (executive staff) to internal or external training programmes. Besides, managers or heads of department are encouraged to systematically convey to their personnel what they themselves have learned (e.g. 'bake off', baking in the department store: the instruction file is made generally accessible).

2.2.3 Developments affecting the training policy

The new sales strategy has not greatly disturbed the training policy. It has, however, been observed that the customer has become much more critical. The company's reaction to this has been to set up a product school, which is designed among other things to improve knowledge of the products.

The historical description (section 1.1) shows that the company operates in four countries. Initially this 'move abroad' led to the organisation of language courses; at present, however, this expansion no longer affects the range of training courses offered.

Five years ago the computer made its entrance into the company. As a result, office workers and members of the middle management received a course entitled 'Introduction to information technology'. Subsequently, the training programme was structured in a more targeted way; check-out staff and senior check-out assistants were given training in using the scanning equipment at the check-out, administrative staff received training on word processing systems, etc. These were one-off training courses, on-the-job training for new staff being provided by colleagues.

This system, which rather falls under the category of informal education, functions as follows: e.g. a newly recruited cashier is placed under the charge of another cashier (who acts as a 'tutor'); the first

week she sits and observes; at the same time she is given an exhaustive list of her duties. Each time she proves she has learned one of these duties, her tutor and the director both initial her list; when all duties have been initialled, she is a fully-fledged cashier. The training process lasts from one to three months. A similar on-the-job training programme has been developed for 'replenishers'. In other words, in this system on-the-job training is in part being formalized.

2.2.4 Evaluation

The company is satisfied with the present range of training programmes and clearly feels that this package meets the needs and requirements. No new large scale training programmes are planned for the near future, although a number of smaller initiatives are planned, geared among other things to increasing the quality of the staff. Examples include performance reviews and the management of malfunctions.

2.3 Trade unions

2.3.1 Presence of trade unions in the company

The trade unions are present in the company in three forms. There are two joint consultative committees, namely the Works' Council and the Health and Safety Committee. Finally, there is a union delegation.
The Works' Council contains 103 delegates, 48 from the Christian Trade Union, 45 from the Socialist Trade Union, 5 from the Liberal Trade Union and 5 members of the management (of the company list). Until two years ago the Works' Council could count on good cooperation from the management. Recently, however, a new managing director took over, with whom the cooperation is much less smooth. The management fails to provide satisfactory answers, or beats about the bush, whenever the trade unions ask for information concerning the application of the labour regulations and the Collective Labour Agreements. The trade unions characterize the climate as poor.
The company has 12 committees for safety, health and upkeep of the workplace. Relations in the committees vary widely. The general comment which is made in this respect is that these committees have a budget, while the unions have absolutely no idea how much this budget amounts to, nor on what it is spent.

Relations at a union level can also hardly be called ideal. The most recent sector agreement was reached for the period 1990/1991. The employer refuses to sign an agreement at company level. The unions are extremely disappointed because the list of demands was deliberately kept extremely short in view of the desire to give smaller companies a chance. The most important demand which the unions wished to air in the negotiations concerns a review of the job classifications. This revue fits in with the discussion on 'equal pay for equal work'. As an example, shelf-stackers help out with check-out duties in peak periods and it is felt that these women should receive exactly the same pay as the check-out assistants.

2.3.2 Involvement in training

The trade unions are not involved in the training initiatives: the unions do not know where the emphasis is placed in the new training programmes, nor do they have any idea of the target group or the duration of the courses. Once a year, rather than quarterly, they are, however, formally informed of a number of training efforts which have taken place during that year.

2.3.3 Evaluation of training efforts

The trade unions agree that a great deal of effort has been put into training in recent years. In spite of this, the training remains far from adequate; four comments are made in this respect.
In the first place, it is felt that the departmental heads do not have sufficient knowledge of social legislation. It is argued that these persons should receive extra training in this connection, in order that the existing arrangements on working hours can be implemented without problems.
Further, it is felt that the existing range of training programmes is far too heavily oriented towards 'topping up' skills: the majority of the training courses do not prepare participants for a job, but are simply intended as 'updating'. In other words, there are insufficient training courses which give people the chance to prepare themselves for a particular job. For example, shelf-stackers and check-out assistants cannot take part in these courses with a view to qualifying for a particular job.

Thirdly, the management is perceived as being unaware of the wishes and expectations of its own workforce. According to the trade union, there is an urgent need for a form of 'career planning', whereby all members of staff are given the opportunity of achieving promotion and of following specially adapted training courses if they wish to do so and if they possess the necessary capacities. At present, there is no such thing as a promotion 'policy'.
A fourth and final comment is that special attention needs to be given to women in the training efforts. This has already been broached in the Works' Council, though unfortunately without result. The discussion on 'positive action' cannot be got off the ground, and little movement is expected in this discussion in the near future.

3. A supermarket

3.1 General information

In this section we shall look at one of the supermarkets. This particular supermarket employs 88 staff, and occupies 20th place out of a total of 106 in the league table of the most successful sales outlets in Belgium.
The product types sold are naturally the same as those at company X, namely fruit and vegetables, dairy produce, groceries, chemist's products, perfumery, drinks, freezer products, bread and confectionery, meat products, fish, delicatessen and non-food goods. The supermarket is situated in a student town, and its clientele is therefore slightly different. The supermarket is embedded in the hierarchical and organizational structure of the company. Its autonomy in the area of training is therefore limited (cf. structure and policy).

Table 7 -

Job title	M/W	F/P	Initial position
Manager	M	F	Assistant manager
Assistant manager	M	F	Shelf-stacker
Head of butchery	M	F	Butcher
Head of food	M	F	Shelf-stacker
Head of fruit & vegetables	M	F	Assistant supervisor
Secretariat	W	P	Check-out assistant
Head of dairy products	W	F	Check-out assistant
Head of wine	M	F	Shelf-stacker
Head of reception	M	F	Check-out assistant
Senior check-out assistant	W	F	Check-out assistant
Senior butcher	M	F	Assistant butcher
Head of non-food	W	F	Shelf-stacker
Head of textiles	W	P	Check-out assistant

3.2 Human resources

The table below shows the number of people with a position of responsibility in the company, a total of 13 people. The following information on these people has been included: job title, gender (M: man, W: woman), job status (F: full time, P: part-time) and initial position in the company.

It can be seen from the table that there are more men in management positions than women, namely 8 men versus 5 women. Part-time working is almost absent, with only two managers working part-time. The throughflow from shop assistants' jobs to more managerial positions is a reality. In fact, only two persons were recruited externally: the manager and the head of fruit and vegetables. Both these persons had already gained experience in another supermarket chain. As far as the rest are concerned, all the managers began as either a shelf-stacker or check-out assistant.
The following table throws light on the shop assistants' jobs. The table shows the job title, the number of persons in this position, the number of men and women (full-time or part-time) within each job category, and finally the position in which these persons started work at the company.

3.3 Training

The staff take part in the group training programmes which are organized by the training department. These training courses take place during working hours. Participation is considered normal and can certainly lead to a more positive evaluation when it comes to promotion.
Each member of the middle management can take part on his or her own initiative in an individual training course of his or her choice. In practice, however, we find that these employees do not take advantage of this opportunity. According to the supermarket manager, only an offer from the district or zone manager can lead to participation; as far as anyone could remember, however, this has to date never occurred.

The range of training courses on offer was given a positive assessment by the supermarket manager, who felt that the range of courses meets the needs of the staff.
In order to chart the training courses followed, we looked at the shop floor. We spoke with the manager, the assistant manager, two supervisors and one shop assistant. Our conversations confirmed the suspicion that the training programmes are

Table 8 -

Job title	Number	Men (F/P)	Women (F/P)	Initial position
Head of bakery	1	-	1 (F)	Shelf-stacker
Head of fish	1	-	1 (P)	Shelf-stacker
Assistant butcher	3	3 (F)	-	-
Shelf-stacker	25	10 (F)	15 (P)	-
Check-out assistant	30	-	30 (P)	-
Shelf-stacker	15	5 (F)	10 (P)	-
Total	75	19	46	

The following comments can be made concerning the shop assistants:

- there is a clear predominance of women;
- there are no male check-out assistants;
- almost all the women work part-time.

geared primarily to product knowledge and are directed at those with supervisory responsibility; shop assistants did not receive any formal training in 1991. This is made clear in the table below.
The supermarket manager received 5 days training in 1991, the majority of the training courses being

Table 9 - Training of supermarket staff in 1991

Position	Training	Duration
Manager	Social legislation	1 day
	Reception of the customer	1 day
	Product display	1 day
	Ergonomics	1 day
	Product training: butchery, dairy and food	1 day
Assistant manager	Information technology	1 day
Head of wine	Tasting course	12 days
	Product knowledge	4 days
	Gastronomy	4 days
Head of fruit & vegetables	Product knowledge	3 days
Check-out assistant	-	

connected with the commercial aspects of his position. The assistant manager took part in only one training course. This is in large contrast to the head of the wine department, who receives 20 days training per year. The head of fruit and vegetables followed a three-day course organized by the product school. The check-out assistant received no formal training in 1991. The course 'Reception of the customer' was attended by the senior check-out assistant and the manager, and these two persons presented a brief report on the session to the check-out assistants.

The level of education of the respondents in our small sample was very low. Indeed, the supermarket manager emphasises the fact that no educational requirements are set on recruitment; social and communicative skills are considered paramount. It was surprising to discover that the check-out assistant, who has been in this position for seven years, had the highest level of education, namely a diploma of short-type higher education.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Evaluation

One thing is clear, namely that account is taken at a policy-making level of the training needs of staff. A structured training programme is provided, without waiting for staff to formulate suggestions themselves.

Moreover, training courses are based primarily on the assistance of internal experts. This is carried out in a structured and rather unique way, via the product school. The advantage of this approach is that it greatly increases the chance that what has been learnt will be transferred to the work situation.

In addition, a large number of the training courses are permanent; in other words, these training programmes are not set up on the basis of 'ad hoc' situations.

In spite of this structured approach, the identification of needs appears to take place in a fairly arbitrary and informal fashion. For that matter, no instrument is available which enables training needs to be detected; reliance is placed on the knowledge and alertness of middle managers in this area. Employees and their representatives are not accepted as discussion partners.

In addition to the fact that there is no means of detecting training needs, there is also a total lack of any form of evaluation. Economic evaluation is made more difficult by the fact that a strict delineation is drawn between group training and individual training, with each middle manager deciding for him or herself which individual training courses he or she will follow. This decentralization turns the whole training programme into a confused jumble. There appears to be absolutely no qualitative evaluation.

In terms of content, the training programme is wide-ranging, and is clearly geared to permanent training. Supermarket managers receive training in marketing, safety and hygiene, account management, reception of the customer, social legislation, communication and product knowledge.

On the basis of our conversations, we are obviously not in a position to pass judgement on the quality of the training programmes. A number of elements do, however, appear to be absent, such as knowledge of foreign languages and an in-depth introduction to the advanced use of the existing technology. Not all target groups have an equally wide range of training programmes available. Departmental heads at the supermarket usually receive 'product' training, while shop assistants receive no training at all, unless this is an 'ad hoc' training session, for example when new technology is introduced.

It can be deduced from the above that the existing training programmes focus primarily on 'updating'. In other words, these training initiatives are not intended to prepare people for a particular job.

Moreover, it is a great pity that there is still a total lack of attention for specific target groups, such as women, for example. Given the demographic evolution and the shortage on the labour market, it is high time that this group came to be regarded on an equal footing with men as workers. What career prospects are there for a woman who works part-time ? Do they take part to the same extent in training initiatives ? What happens to women who temporarily leave the jobs market; are they able to start at the same level on re-entry, do they have access to the training programmes during their absence? This is a whole series of questions to which there is no immediate answer. In fact, according to the trade unions, the discussion on 'positive action' has already been broached repeatedly without result. And yet this is quite remarkable given that it would

require absolutely no additional financial efforts from the employer. In fact, in the last interprofessional agreement, it was agreed that every employer should invest 0.25% of the total wages bill in a training and employment fund. In other words, whenever an employer wishes to start up training initiatives for particular risk groups (e.g. women, the handicapped, the poorly educated, older workers threatened with unemployment, etc.), he can call on support from this fund [5].

4.2 Transferability

Company X has built up a wide range of training programmes. It is a statement of the obvious that not every company has the financial strength to develop initiatives on this scale. The transferability to small and medium-sized companies is therefore limited; for larger companies, by contrast, the approach adopted by company X is perfectly transferable.

One initiative which is interesting for both small and large companies is the product school. This is the result of cooperation between staff from the purchasing department, the departmental heads in the supermarket and representatives of the suppliers. In other words the firm makes maximum use of internal expertise within a structured system. This formula offers a great advantage: it enables the departmental heads to update their product knowledge at regular intervals and to come into contact with the new products. The chance that what has been learnt will be transferred to the work situation increases.

Appendix

Major training programmes for the sales personnel

Social legislation	Directors S. M. Deputy directors Secretaries Chief cashiers Heads-food
Qualita of products and services	Heads – food Heads – fruit and vegetables Heads – non-food Directors S. M.
Introduction to computers	Directors S. M. Deputy directors
Micro-marketing	Directors S. M. Deputy directors
Security-hygiene	Directors S. M.
Ergonomics	District managers Directors S. M.
First aid	Sales staff and stores
Staff management	District managers Directors S. M. Deputy directors S. M.
Reception	Cashiers
Leadership	Supervisors Zellik-Ninove-Osseghem
Time management	Middle management
Operations	Supervisors – Zellik
Sales – gastronomy wine	Wine sales staff
Accounting	Directors S. M. Deputy directors
Working relations	Sector managers Dial
Product instruction	Buyers

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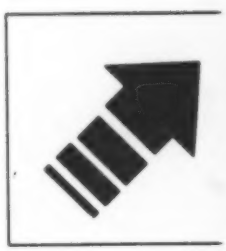
[5] For a description of the 0.25% rule see Ignace Pollet, 'Employment, work and training in Belgian retailing', HIVA, 1992, p. 34.

PART 3:



General conclusions

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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

3.

In this chapter we aim to reflect on what continuing training in the retail sector stands for, starting from what we found in our two cases. For this we keep the few tendencies in mind that are put forward by the conclusion of the sector study. The two cases we've described are to be situated at the opposing ends of the size-scale. They've been selected on the suggestion of the social partners and on the basis of relevance, accessibility and cooperativeness. We'll use the same names as in the previous chapters: case Incobé and case X.

1. Planning and conception of training

1.1 Level of decisions concerning training

The sort of planning and conception of training that is dealt with here is obviously to be situated on company level. There is no sectoral or regional policy that notably affects company decisions on the what's , where's and when's of training. This might change in the future as a Joint Committee Agreement foresees a fund from total pay roll for 'training and employment of the under-privileged' (called 0.25 %).

In both cases we can detect at least some systematic approach of training-planning. By 1990, company X has started the setting up of a 'product school' in order to make personnel of all levels and departments acquainted with the products. Department heads constitute the main share of the participation at these 'group training' sessions. A coordinator takes charge of the organizational aspects. This product school is a response to the idea of permanent training.

In the other case (Incobé) we have an external body developing training programmes for a group of companies. According to a fixed procedure, those companies (which are at the same time clients and shareholders) decide year per year which programme will be on offer.

1.2 Objectives of training and assessment of skill

Training objectives should theoretically be related to recruitment and promotion policy, the gap between available and required qualifications and labour market bottle-necks. We won't go into this here. Still, skill assessment is only one of the ways of looking at training initiatives.

In case X the permanent training initiatives (the ones gathered by the so-called product school in particular) focus on product knowledge in order to motivate department heads of supermarkets. This also induces some degree of internal marketing, customer service and improved communication between sales and purchasing departments. So here we have a training objective in terms of socio-normative skills, to be geared by a regular updating of knowledge (which is of course a training objective in its own right) and to lead ultimately to a higher cash-flow. Other group trainings (meant for supermarket directors) include social legislation, selection techniques, reception of the customer, ergonomics and account management. The more occasional training activities happen on the initiative of members of the middle management, who decide independently on the relevance and financial cost of an individual training course.

As for training objectives, the Incobé-case shows some similarities in the issue ('customer-oriented approach') but quite a difference in the implementation: the training programme is completely worked out by the supplier (i.e. Incobé) while the companies let their personnel participate on a confidence basis. The skills targeted here are of the socio-normative kind as well, but the things learned are basically practical. Whereas case X could be defined as 'education', we here rather speak of 'training'.

1.3 Social relations

It is known that, due to the sector image and the terms of employment (especially the working hours), X has a recruiting problem for the lower positions. For middle and top positions, external recruitment often blocks promotion opportunities. Trade union representatives are not involved in any of the training initiatives. According to them, few training courses give people the chance to prepare themselves for a particular job. They have doubts about the instrumental, functional character of training and education in the company.

In the Incobé-case, the skills acquired do seem more straightforwardly transmittable although the whole training package is worked out for furniture-selling. It is meant for SME's (small and medium enterprises) where the decisions are taken by the employer (no social partners to speak of, union membership being an individual matter). Employees follow courses on assignment of the manager by whom it is thought to be important that employees feel in agreement on the usefulness of the training.

2. Target group

67% of the wage-earners in the retail sector are women; 80% are employed for clerical work and 43% work on a part-time contract. We also should note that wage-earners constitute only 66% of the total employment in the retail sector.

In both cases the target groups of training programmes are defined in functional terms, not in morphological terms. In case X, the greatest range of courses appears to cater for sales staff, although administrative employees and manual workers are eligible to take part as well. But the manual workers take part almost exclusively in training courses with an ad hoc character. Concerning sales personnel, supermarket managers and departmental heads receive substantially more training than shop assistants. The latter receive no permanent training. The hierarchical division inside the sales department also embodies a division between the sexes (with less women in management positions) which means that women (who mostly work part-time) receive less training than men. In general, the existing training programmes focus primarily on 'updating' and are intended for staff already in employment rather than for newcomers. One could deduce from those facts that the lower degree of training for female part-time shop assistants leads to poorer career chances. This might be an indication that – as we stated in the sector study – training initiatives might enforce the discord between different job and function levels.

In the other case (Incobé), the target groups are

functionally clearly defined according to the programme: there's a permanent programme for managers, another for salespeople, one for receptionists and one for installers. Morphologically speaking, the receptionists or shop assistants are a predominantly female while all 20 installers who followed the installation course are men. The common feature is that all personnel belong to SME's.

3. Content, methods and organization

With two cases we can't claim to have a reliable view on general tendencies concerning corporate training in the retail sector. The two cases prove to be very specific, each of them constituting an example for other companies of their size.

Case X (large company) tends to internalize as much as possible of the CVE and organize all aspects itself. There is an attempt to motivate personnel to attend courses regularly and consider this as an integral part of the job. Courses never last very long and the permanent character lies in the quick succession of courses that are on offer. The transferability of all this to small and medium-sized enterprises, of course, is limited. What could be imitated by both large and small companies is the product school as an example of making maximum use of internal expertise within a structured system. The cooperation with the purchasing department and the suppliers enables the departmental heads to update their product knowledge at regular intervals.

The Incobé-case leaves a different impression as far as methods and organization is concerned. From the perspective of the SME's involved, it means that training (both planning and organization) is arranged externally. The permanent character here lies in the fact that training sessions are part of programmes on a yearly contract basis. Another difference could be seen in the training subject, which emphasizes general commercial skills and a customer-oriented attitude to be picked up on all staff levels. A lot of stress is laid upon the didactical approach (video recording, programmed instruction, refresher files). Specific skills (product knowledge) remain on the background since participants constitute a homogeneous group when it comes to the business they're in. The transferability of the formula is evident. Any group of retailers from the same subsector could see it as a common interest to let their personnel acquire new qualifications and skills on a permanent base. The formula allows SME's to acquire skills featuring a direct applicability while remaining payable. By this, SME's overcome their scale-disadvantage which mostly forms the stumbling block for training and education.

As a common feature of the two cases, there's no linkage with the national education system or with any sectoral programme. Corporate training in the retail appears like a pattern of loose islands in a sea of hidden qualification requirements.

4. Cost, financing and evolution

In case X, no figures are available which give an idea of the number of participants and the overall costs of the training initiatives. This means the supply of training courses is not evaluated in terms of its economic costs. For this, one could wonder whether this supply is a clearly thought-over policy or rather a result from emerging initiatives.

In the Incobé-case, there's a fixed price per participant per session. In the company we followed, this would signify a budget of roughly 4000.- ECU (averaging 1333 ECU per annum) in the period 1989-1991. This covers a total of 11 session attendances (or 17 days).

In both cases there's no sign of systematic attempts to evaluate the benefits and impacts of training, neither economically nor qualitatively. This corresponds with the absence of any means of detecting training needs. Everything is left to the judgement of staff personnel and middle managers (case X) or the general managers (Incobé case). We ourselves were not in a position to pass judgement on the quality of the programmes.

From what is told above, one can easily see that training and education in the Belgian retail sector comes like a loose composition, with many themes still to be improvised – if at all being played. There seems reason for the assumption of two developments. First, there might be divergency in training chances between top personnel and lower-ranking personnel, reflecting the inequality in career perspectives and the mere quality of work. Governmental schemes (incentives) could somehow play a corrective role here, by supporting educational programmes at enterprise level for the low qualified. Secondly, we might expect to see a growing inequality in training on offer between personnel of large enterprises and personnel of SME's. Large companies do have the ability to organize most of the training internally, thereby involving as much personnel as they can (the session, not the participant being the amt of account). In SME's, every participant to a (evidently external) session incurs cost. Moreover, the smaller the firm, the heavier the weight of lost man-hours and the harder it is to substitute an absent trainee. In this perspective, our Incobé-case, without exaggerating or idealizing this formula proves a way out and helps SME's to overcome their reluctancy for training initiatives.

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